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ROCHE-BLANCHE;

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A Romance.

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LONDON:

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ROCHE-BLANCHE;

OR, THE

HUNTERS OF THE PYRENEES.

A Romance.

By MISS ANNA MARIA PORTER,

AUTHOR OF "THE VILLAGE OF MARIENDORPT," &c.

O 'tis a gallant vessel! but the wind
Strives fiercely in her sails: each sleety blast
Rifles her shrouds; while the froth'd brine o'ertops
Her topmast's head. -- Hark to that pealing gust!
It roll'd along the mountainous waves, as 'twere
Thunder 'mong Alps; or the dread voice of doom. --
Brother spirit! think you this bark will 'scape,
Or all her freight of goodly virtues, be
Wreck'd by yon treach'rous rock? Woe's me, there's one
Upon the lofty shore, straining each sense;
With cries and clasped hands asking to save,
Who if voice answer'd him, or instinct taught
Which wave might bear him right, would instant plunge
Into the yawning gulph; so to attain
And share, like fate with this lone bark! *MS. Poem.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ROCHE BLANC;

OR,

THE HUNTERS OF THE PYRENEES.

CHAPTER I.

Mr. Willoughby and his son reached Paris, after the usual time of being on the road, and the ordinary disagreeables of a long journey.

They went at once to the Hotel de Condé, where the Prince welcomed Mr. Willoughby with congratulations upon the accession of Elizabeth to the throne of England, coupling these with the important information that, although good policy did not permit her to repress the Catholics entirely, she was evidently

inclined to bestow her highest marks of favour upon the professors of her mother's religion.

Since peace had taken place between the two countries, communications from England were frequent; so that the Prince was able to instruct Mr. Willoughby where to make his court, and in what manner, if he would conciliate the favour of the new queen: at the same time he gave him an introductory letter to one of the persons most distinguished by Elizabeth's confidence. In this letter, Condé spoke of the young Clarence, for whose interests the anxious father was about to contend, in such terms of commendation for gallantry as a soldier, and good mien as a gentleman, as at once showed his own esteem for him, and his insight into Elizabeth's character; frankly saying, that if the affair were prosperous, he should call upon Clarence's good offices at the English court, if ever the Protestant interest in France should require foreign

countenance. He then gaily insisted upon retaining a pledge to that purpose, in the person of the younger Willoughby himself.

It was Condé's opinion, that now was the moment for presenting Clarence to the world, as the kinsman of Elizabeth and the son of her mother's friend. All danger from such an avowal was past. Of the four brothers of the house of De la Pole, the two best, Lord Montacute and the Cardinal, and Geoffry, the least worthy, were no more. Arthur, the remaining one, was too busily occupied in maintaining his own place in the new government, to have time for cabals at a foreign court against a blameless youth like his nephew. As not one of the De la Pole's had had a son born to them, except Arthur, there were few persons to practise against Clarence's claim to their blood; and as they had no reason to dispute his title to his mother's fortune, for their own interest's sake,

opposition from them upon that score need not be apprehended. It was principally from the powerful house, that of Dudley, into which Rosamond had entered by her second marriage, that Mr. Willoughby need fear successful persecution and ill-will. It would, therefore, be as wise in him to keep Clarence at Paris, beyond the reach of their immediate hostility, as it would be consistent with his avowed motives for remaining so long inactive, to let his son be known there in his proper character.

The Prince repeated, that as it should seem, nothing but the certainty of religious persecution had hitherto kept Mr. Willoughby from prosecuting his son's rights in England, it would be discordant with this, to appear doubtful of those rights himself, by suffering his son to enter the circles of Paris without assuming for him the respect and privileges of distinguished blood.

Condé offered so to present him: and

to render it impossible for any impertinence to be offered his *elève* by persons, who, from envy of himself, or enmity to his friends, sought occasion of disputing his right to certain observances, he further offered him an honorary situation about himself. The amiable Prince condescended to add, that the place he had to bestow on Clarence need not interfere with the private friendship between him and the Chevalier, though it would remove him from the equivocal characters of a stranger and a favorite, by putting him at once upon a level with other young men of noble blood, and honourable offices.

Overpowered with gratitude and pleasure, Mr. Willoughby in vain attempted to thank the gracious Prince, who, frankly, laughing, declared that he was self-interested; confessing, that he looked to a time when Clarence Willoughby's heart and arm in France, (were he destined to remain there,) or his serving

influence in England, after he had regained his station in that country, might be most serviceable to the cause Condé had at heart, that of religious freedom. Clarence was not often deprived by emotion of his ordinary powers; but so many strong feelings worked within him now, that only the eloquent blood in his cheek answered the Prince.

It was impossible for so young a man as he, one so alive to distinction, so shrinkingly abhorrent of all that renders affectionate professions suspected, — it was impossible for such an one to hear, without the strongest agitation, that he was going to be proclaimed the descendant of that royal duke whose name he bore, and by such means be entitled to rank himself with the Chevalier de Bourbon. With a beating heart, he saw the Prince de Condé attentively peruse the letters from Ann Boleyn, which were to be presented to the royal daughter of that unhappy lady, as the main evidences of his

legitimacy; with inward transport, he heard the Prince declare his own satisfaction from them, and his belief that, as Elizabeth must be aware that "the handsome Willoughby," as he was then called, had been named amongst her mother's imputed admirers, she must be sensible, that, by admitting the facts contained in these letters, and the authenticity of the letters themselves, she would be effacing one stain from the injured Queen's name.

The testimony of these papers Mr. Willoughby hoped to strengthen by a living witness of his marriage, whom he went to seek in England. The only bar he dreaded to his son's speedy triumph, was the Queen's evident leaning to a temporizing sort of policy; that obvious wish in her, to conciliate the Catholics, whom she might offend by any decision against the family of De la Pole. He dreaded too, her personal regard for the race of Dudley. These were the cir-

cumstances Mr. Willoughby said he had to combat; and as the Prince de Condé avowedly thought, that it would be best for him to combat them alone, Clarence was reluctantly obliged to confess, that he, too, believed it would be wisest for him to deny himself the gratification of accompanying his father.

"Aye, — stay amongst us here," said Condé, with his ordinary freedom, "till we have dressed the rough soldier in such a court suit of graces as win women's favour; we will then send you to England, to reap the harvest sown by your father."

Mr. Willoughby knew enough of queens, to acknowledge the sound advice concealed under this lively address; and openly meeting it, he confessed to the Prince, that he wished his son to make use of his time, accomplishing himself in every graceful exercise of the body, while endeavouring to store his mind with lessons of true honour and

upright policy, in the noble school of his princely patron.

At this conference Adhemar de Bourbon was not present, having gone on business of importance to his inheritance of Limoges; he returned not, until Mr. Willoughby, to whom every moment of time was precious, had departed for Calais, accompanied by his son. Clarence would not be dissuaded from going to the furthest point allowed him, with this kind parent; even the last farewell he would not give him, except on board the vessel he was to sail in. He could not be satisfied until he had seen the accommodations of this small vessel, talked with the captain, bespoke the civility and good will of the seamen for his father by secret liberalities; and besought him again and again, not to lose a single moment in sending him his summons to England, whenever it would be fit to do so.

On the deck of the slight bark, with the wind only blowing freshly and fairly,

the waves running blue and bright under a smiling sky, the father and son exchanged a hasty embrace in silence, both were ashamed of their inward emotion; for if omens were ever to be trusted, Mr. Willoughby's errand bid fair to be prosperous.—Clarence whispered this as the blustering blast blew his thick locks in the direction of England, while he bent forward to kiss his father's forehead. Mr. Willoughby answered him, by a stronger pressure of his clasping hand, then tore himself away. Clarence sprung into the boat which waited to carry him back to the French coast.

The faint line of that of England was then visible directly opposite, glittering in the sun; almost unconsciously he sent up a fervent prayer for a blessing on that coast, and upon him who was then steering for it; and snatching at one of the oars, tried to stifle his regrets by active exertion: in a very few minutes he found himself at Calais again.

Upon reaching Paris, Clarence's first action was to seek his friend Adhemar de Bourbon, and pour into his bosom all that had been related to him by his father at L'etoile.

The Chevalier, previously informed of the main fact, Clarence's relationship to the powerful family of De la Pole, received the rest of the communication with more interest than surprise; remarking, as Clarence concluded, upon the mixed coincidence and dissimilarity of their situations.

"Your father was right, Willoughby," he said, recovering from a reverie into which he fell immediately afterwards; "had he taken you to England before your rights there are substantiated, the contumely you might have met with, would have broken your spirit; you could not have brooked the impertinencies which the De la Pole's or Dudley's satellites ——"

"Broken my spirit!" interrupted

Clarence, turning round upon him with inconsiderate hastiness. "What! with the consciousness that I am, what I say I am! Not so, by this arm! I might break some of these scurvy knaves' pates, perhaps, in a sudden transport of foolish passion (to the which, I own, I am mainly given); but may I suffer death, if any one of their ribbald jests should start a single rivet of my heart! — There, dear Chevalier, you and I are differently tempered. You are of finer metal, I do allow; for the least fault offends your brightness (and how bright I think you, well do you know); but is not my hardier coat of iron a better suit for this rude and buffetting world? — Foul breaths it need not heed; and sound knocks it knows how to resist. No man can scoff me now out of the belief that I have a right to equal myself, in point of birth, with some of the noblest in England; and so long as I feel within me the determination to make good blood

only a herald to my better deservings, I have a right to be proud of it."

The Chevalier raised his troubled eyes, and fixed them intently upon the face of Clarence. "Willoughby," he said; "magnanimous Willoughby! I envy you. And to you I say, what I never yet said so fully to any man, — that the stain of my birth is wormwood to me. *That* uncancelled, all the pomps and pageantries which my title and possessions surround me with, are mockeries: they may take others in, — they never cheat myself."

"What, my noble friend!" exclaimed Clarence, ashamed of his late precipitancy of speech; "is it for you to found your claims to distinction upon the mere accident of birth? — You, whose military reputation might reflect honour upon a nobler name than that of Bourbon, if such name there be! — You, who won the admiration of the haughty Guises themselves, at the age in which I was a mere idler amongst vagrants and mountaineers!

Do you not allow that a valid rank is necessary for me, who cannot otherwise open the gate to my honest ambition? But for you, that have already broken out a way for yourself, to envy the unfledged spirit that only eyes your eagle flight, as yet, with vain emulation ——"

"Perhaps I do myself more justice than I think," interrupted Adhemar, mastering the sudden thrill of gratified self-love which his friend's amiable warmth occasioned. "I am sensible that I deserve some such consideration as I myself am fond to yield to living and dead worth; yet, while it is in the power of any vulgar hind to treat my pretensions with scorn, that consciousness is nothing. Were the stain effaced,—were the one grand object of all my efforts attained ——" Clarence too hastily raised his eyes at this, and fixed them full of anxious enquiry upon the face of his friend. As yet, he had never ventured to question him in any other language.

The Chevalier turned from their speaking fixture in visible disorder. He got up, traversed the apartment two or three times, then abruptly stopping, and forcing a smile, he said, "Let us have done with this unwise conversation."

Clarence regarded him earnestly, till his own eyes saddened; he then turned them away, saying, as he did so, "I will not be mortified that you have a secret from him, noble Adhemar, who would rip open his breast at your bidding. If I long to know this secret, it is because I would learn whether there is a chance of me or mine ever being able to serve you, in any way, or at any period. Every drop of blood in the heart your example first fired with honourable ambition, is, and ought to be, at your command, whenever you need it."

"Then you *shall* share my soul!" exclaimed the Chevalier, taking a sudden resolution. "My secret, Clarence, perhaps all the world, except yourself,

guesses: — it is, my *determination* not to remain all my life the mock of fools, — the concealed scorn of the titled slaves, that lacquey me like hirelings. My nature inclines me to as familiar a frankness with those I live amongst as my uncle Condé's does; yet am I obliged to hedge myself round with haughtiness and reserve to keep impertinents at a distance. If men show that they disallow my title to the place I fill by courtesy, they gall me: — if they seem to grant it, they humble me; for I feel it is a grace, an alms, they are bestowing.

"My uncles, indeed, have ever treated me as their nephew, and brooked no failure towards me from those about them; but the other princes of our house, Montpensier and Roche-sur-Yon, sting me with their proud distinctions. I cannot quarrel with them; for they give me all the observances of kindred and courtesy: but they accept no sacrifice of precedence from others for me. — Do not

scorn me, Willoughby, if I confess that the torments of the damned are not greater than the pangs with which I see them, at court and public ceremonies, taking their place, as princes, next the throne; while I stand aloof, only Vicomte de Limoges. — I, in whose veins the Bourbon blood flows as purely, and I will say, as nobly, as in any of their veins!"

The fitful changes of the Chevalier's olive complexion, as he spoke, bore witness to the keen feelings he described. Clarence took and pressed his hand strongly: he was about to speak, when his friend, whose soul had burst its prison-house, resumed with yet greater impetuosity.

"It is this which shuts me out from spectacles and pageants, from councils and cabinets, — where I, a Bourbon, am disallowed the title of Monseigneur, and herded with ordinary nobility by that brand of spurious birth. I find myself *first*, only in the field, — forgive my boast-

ing, — and thither I go, therefore, like the bridegroom to his bridal. But war endures not for ever; and I return into the every-day world, to be elbowed and pushed back by titled insects, whom my breath ought to have the power of blowing into their original nothing. Yet am I mocked all the time with the name of Bourbon!"

The Chevalier smiled bitterly as he uttered this; then resumed: — "This is my secret, Willoughby, — this is my hoarded misery. To be legitimated, I now tell you, is the sole end and aim of my life: I will compass it at last, cost what it may. That alone is the object I have sought through every field of slaughter wherein I have bled; and that is the object I will still pursue, even into the throat of the cannon. Do you love me well enough to follow me there? I know you do. But do you love me well enough to serve me by slower, surer, safer means?"

Clarence's answer may be imagined. Surprised, affected, almost confounded, by this abrupt disclosure of his friend's morbid estimation of what appeared a mote to him in comparison with merited distinction, he could only reply by professions of the most perfect and sincere devotedness now, and at all times. Adhemar squeezed his hand.

"If I am ever to find truth on earth," he exclaimed, "it seems I shall find it in you. — Well, then, learn from me, that, much as my uncle Condé regards me, he has ever shown himself strangely regardless of this wish, avowed to him from my earliest years. There have been times, when he might have pushed my claim on the favour of the king to grant the letter patent, which would at once place me where nature did originally. From the post you have accepted about my uncle, you will have frequent opportunities of discovering, whether this injurious neglect is the consequence of

jealous hostility to my desire — for my uncle has pride, and may as little wish me to rank as an absolute prince of the blood, as Montpensier himself — or whether it is indeed, as he avers, that he waits for the right moment to re-urge this suit. He tells me that he pressed it on my uncle d'Enghien's death — yes! he knew how cruelly d'Enghien thwarted me in another pursuit; but let that pass, — I suppose he felt then, that both, owed me some compensation. But to the point. It imports me to know Willoughby, whether my uncle deals fairly with me, or is only amusing me with words, to keep me from acting for myself. Do you take heed to him, then: attend to what he says of me in his unguarded hours of jest and random talk —"

"Chevalier!" interrupted Clarence, "I cannot be a spy. But," he added, seeing the instant suffusion of De Bourbon's cheek, "I will do all else for

you. I will enforce your high claims; I will say all that my rude speech can help me to, in aid of what you wish. I will do every thing for you, dear and honoured as you are — except an act of — " Clarence hesitated; but the word was indispensable, and he forced himself to utter it.

" A baseness I do not ask of you," Adhemar replied, after a struggling silence, repeating Clarence's hardly-aspirated word with strong emphasis, though his lip quivered and grew white the while. — " I did not mean you to lay any trap for my uncle, Sir: I simply wished you to discover what my own unmanning excess of agitation, when I would talk upon this theme, makes it impossible for me to do myself. But I disdain to ask it of you now. I cease to expect steady friendship from any man."

The wringing sigh which came out with the last bitter words, haughty as the Chevalier looked, shook Clarence to

the soul. With instant compunction he threw himself upon his friend's hand, exclaiming, "Pardon me, noble De Bourbon! — I am a fiery, inconsiderate fool, jealous of the mere shadow of dishonour. I ought to have known that *you* could counsel nothing mean or base. I am sure you mean only what I now apprehend: and, therefore, such service as honour may render, and honour accept, I now faithfully engage to attempt. Think me not a renegade, however, from this promise, on the instant of making it, if I try to convince you, that in so passionately desiring this *Court order* for being considered a prince, you are refusing to see the height to which your own actions have raised you. Envy sees it; and it is envy only that endeavours to find some counterpoise to your individual greatness."

Adhemar de Bourbon smiled, and, returning the pressure of the agitated hand which had all this time been clasp-

ing his, with alternate vehemence and persuasiveness, said, relentingly, "Is your voice the harp of David, and am I the unhappy Saul, whom nothing else can charm into composure and confidence?"

"I am your David, or your Jonathan, which you will," exclaimed Clarence, so strongly moved, that he pressed his friend's hand in both of his against his heart. "Come, then, you shall say to me, all that I see labouring in your thoughts," returned De Bourbon, regarding him with a look, which, like a sudden sunbeam on a cloud, appeared but to shew its darkness, and then vanish. "You will not easily persuade me to feel your disregard for an acquisition, the value of which you must live in the world of Paris, perhaps, to comprehend: you will only convince me of your attachment, I hope; I believe." The ray broke through his clouded eyes again, as a speaking glance from those

of Clarence, induced him to add the last expression. He then waited for the latter to speak. Confused in his ideas, and grieved in his soul by the confession of the Chevalier, Clarence knew not how to convince him that he strangely overrated the value of a mere arbitrary act. To Clarence's sounder sight, such an expedient as a letter patent for effacing the scandal of spurious birth, seemed a mere shadow of honour. In his estimation, the scandal of illegitimacy consisted in the unchastity of the parents; and what royal mandate could transmute sin into virtue? Nothing appeared to him substantial in such a grace, except the door it opened to ambitious desire. Once legitimated, Adhemar would have a chance in common with the other Bourbon princes, remote as the prospect was, for the throne of France. Perhaps, then, this dazzling object attracted him; if not immediately for himself, for the race that might spring from him hereafter.

Such a consequence might well render this otherwise slight object a prize worth seeking; at any rate, if by some strange delusion Adhemar had persuaded himself to receive the patent of legitimacy for legitimacy itself, was it the part of a friend to undeceive him? Was it the part of grateful affection to teach him fastidious distinctions, where the reverse would bestow happiness? And, circumstanced as Clarence was, in point of honourable birth, would it not be indelicate and unfeeling to press on another the impossibility of changing the nature of his —.

Thus Clarence at first argued with himself; but quickly recollecting that it would be a nobler and kinder task to awaken his friend to a salutary truth than to leave him in a dangerous error, he boldly and vehemently urged on him his own great deserts, his widely spread reputation, the solid power he possessed, and the popular estimation he enjoyed.

He told him that he ought to disdain the suffrage of minds which refused homage to such desert; and that he ought to build self-respect upon the rock of his own consciousness, the only foundation not to be shaken by the breaths of scoffers and malignants. If he waited for peace of mind, and honest self-regard, until the king's command had placed him under the shelter of acknowledged relationship to the throne, it was possible, nay, probable, that he might remain all his life a miserable man. Clarence, therefore, conjured him to shake off this frivolous desire, as he would rouse himself from an infatuated passion for some worthless charmer, and *feel* the noble character he was.

De Bourbon was scarcely more gratified than humbled by this discourse. To receive lessons of true honour from an inexperienced boy might be galling; to feel sensible that they convinced his reason, yet not his passions, was still

more galling: but that boy's generous devotedness spoke too distinctly in his looks, for him to believe that the difference in their sentiments on this subject had staggered his affection for an instant; and the picture he painted of the Chevalier's merit and popularity was too engaging for the latter to feel displeased at the few harsh touches which were perforce introduced there.

When Clarence stopped, de Bourbon rose from his seat, with an expression of complacent kindness: "We will now leave this argument where it is, Willoughby: after you have lived four months in Paris, we will resume it. We shall then treat upon something like equal terms. At present, you certainly see things as they really are; but after you have gone into the juggling world, you will find every one of them transformed; your own opinions transformed; and you will discover, that if your destiny is to be in the world, you must

try for the images of wood and clay, which its sorcery has turned into gods."

"I accept your conditions!" exclaimed Clarence, his countenance clearing and brightening; "so I put myself into your hands, to lead me, meanwhile, where it will be pleasantest and safest for me to go."

"There is no place safe in Paris, I can tell you," returned Adhemar; "so take care, betimes, of pitfalls and precipices. Look to yourself, dear Willoughby; and remember, that out of some perils no friend can snatch you against your own inclination. But though I think, with your ardent nature, you have a tempting devil within you, that you dream not of, I do believe the good principle far stronger; therefore I fear not for your victory at last."

"I believe the best strength I shall have, then," returned Clarence, colouring a little, "will be the thought of my father. So, whenever I seem forgetful

of what would grieve him, or shame me to confess to him, may I beseech you, dear Chevalier, to make a moral lecture of his name."

This promise was cordially given; and very soon afterwards the inexperienced Clarence plunged into the untried world of a great and voluptuous capital.

CHAP. V.

Paris was at that period what it has continued ever since, — the centre of all that is elegant, seducing, and dangerous. The monarch himself was in the prime of life; accessible to pleasure, fond of pageantry, of martial shows, and of popular admiration: his queen, the celebrated, the detestable, Catherine de Medicis, the serpent-train of whose character long hid itself under flowers, obsequiously administered to her consort's tastes, while conscious of only sharing his affections. She had that in prospect which she subsequently attained — power, grounded upon subjugating the better principle of man to

his appetites and passions. Her court was therefore the bower of Circe.

Skilled in moulding pliant youth to her subtle purposes, she surrounded herself with the youngest and loveliest of the female noblesse. Modesty turns blushing from the description of the irregularities of conduct, and the indecency of attire, recorded of these pitiable victims to their own attractions. Allegorical *fêtes*, borrowed from the classical ideas of her illustrious house, and embodied in the persons of her beautiful ladies of honour, were some of the weapons in Catherine de Medicis' armory. With these baits, she caught the merely voluptuous, and the idle: for characters of stronger impulse, she had the stimulus of gambling; games of chance and calculation, with cards or dice. For yet nobler spirits, she held out the manly exercises of the ring, — the carousel, the tourney. These she varied with such admirable dexterity, so adroitly manag-

ing and providing for the peculiar passions and weaknesses of each distinctive class of characters, that perhaps of all the court there was not a person, however wise or cold, exempt from her subtle influence. The magnificence of her native Florence seemed to follow this matchless seducer wherever she went, — the arts, the graces, the loves, composed her train; and secretly fixing her eye upon a higher quarry than any game she pointed out to others, she left it to the vain or susceptible beauties in her suite to conquer hearts for her to mould.

The court was at Fontainbleau when Clarence was first presented.

The festivities of one royal marriage, that of the Dauphin with the young Queen of Scots, were then in their zenith; while others were in prospect, to celebrate the expected nuptials of two Princesses of France with the King of Spain and the Duke of Savoy.

The court was crowded with Spanish and Piedmontese nobility, in addition to that of its own growth: all of them emulous to exalt the address and splendour of their country, in their individual persons. Rivalry in equipages, retinues, and costly apparel, was not disdained even by those whose superiority in nobler objects of competition was universally acknowledged. This inferior species of emulation threw additional lustre over the public spectacles, affording a poignant contrast to those martial shows of mimic war (the remnants of chivalry) which were then the fashion, and which were exhibited with rude and picturesque fidelity, for the entertainment of the ladies.

In these shows, regular sieges were undertaken of places fortified with admirable skill, to represent fortresses of greater or lesser magnitude; pitched battles were fought; ambuscades exemplified; the prize, to be gained at the

expense of infinite fatigue, skill, and, it must be owned, covert danger, was sometimes the favourite colours of a leading combatant's mistress — sometimes an honorary decoration, bestowed by the fair object of these *fêtes* herself.

That beauteous head, which was afterwards brought to the block, then wore the diadem of one kingdom, with that of another in prospect. The unhappy Mary of Scotland, at this time in the full brightness of that visionary beauty which, we are told, realized the dreams of poets, and embodied the *beau idéal* of Grecian sculptors, was the day-star of Henry the Second's court: her presence at their warlike exhibitions stimulated the young chevaliers into bolder exertions; and her smile overpaid them.

Formed for superiority in such exercises, and, like his father, peculiarly distinguished for grace and address on horseback, Clarence soon attracted the

notice of Catherine de Medicis, whose eye was ever on the watch for new and charming objects to embellish her pageantries. The habits of Clarence's boyhood, in addition to his later acquirements, gave him great advantages over other competitors, wherever bodily activity was to be united with graceful address; and the brilliant quickness of his mental powers rendered him equally admirable in those scenic representations, where even the great Condé is said not to have disdained taking a part.

Always acquitting himself well, though more heedlessly than any of his companions, Clarence was soon named of all the Queen's parties, whether in the country or in the capital. She now and then condescended to converse with him upon the subject of those exercises in which he excelled; and not unfrequently, with the most delicate species of flattery,

praised the qualities and graces of his friend.

Intoxicated with such incense, offered by such a hand; surrounded by the sighs of beauties so youthful, that it was impossible to couple any other idea than that of innocence with their ravishing charms; surprised by ten thousand novelties of exquisite taste and refined luxury; and from his temperament equally open to the enticements of pleasure, as to the excitement of glory, can it be wondered at, that a young man under twenty should find it difficult to resist these combined attractions? For awhile he trod the slippery precipices of this seducing court with more toil and apprehension than he had ever experienced among those of his paternal rocks, dizzily uncertain whither he was going, in what company, and at what he ought to aim.

Sometimes, exhausted with hard and frequent struggles, there were moments

when he was on the point of ceding to violent temptation; but his better angel ever interfered, and either in the shape of sudden disgust at unexpected depravity, or in fortunate discovery of ruinous consequences, saved him from himself and others.

By degrees the brilliant mist, which had covered as many hideous as beautiful objects, cleared away, discovering, more distinctly, the exquisite forms of the one, and the unsuspected deformity of the other; by degrees, also, the billows of impetuous passions subsided, and the summits of nobler affections were seen, though dimly and at a distance, like a vision of the promised land.

The next danger which assailed him after this surprise of all the senses at once, was the individual attacks of sentiment. Clarence more than once fancied himself in love, because, perhaps, he wished to be so; or he caught the infection from others; or he was eager to

shelter himself from that vagrant humour which, most of his companions assured him, was sooner or later the fate of unattached hearts.

But even his love-fits were too moderate and too transitory to deceive himself; and no sooner were they past, than he arraigned himself for credulity, or vanity, or the mere spirit of competition, as the case might warrant. But never had Clarence to reproach himself with seeking a heart only to learn his interest there, and to abandon it. His unadulterated feelings recoiled from the mixed levity and ruthlessness of those young courtiers, whom he saw ridiculing the tenderness they had basely purchased by a thousand perjuries; or, more basely still, by looks and touching insinuations, which *committed not* themselves, while they made surer conquest of their victim.

Hurried away by his own sensibility, Clarence might deceive himself; but it was not in his nature to disappoint

others. Had he found faithful hearts, his own would have been unchangeable. — Even he, delightful as he was acknowledged to be, was doomed to discover, that if there are few persons fitted to inspire a profound and lasting passion, there are yet fewer formed to feel it. He was admired, loved, courted, and given up in his turn, by different beauties successively. Vanity, or the lawless habits of that dangerous court, stimulated their pursuits; so that his quick sensibility to apparent tenderness satisfying the vain, and his honourable indignation rebuking the levity of the unworthier sort, he was soon left for more difficult or more easy conquests.

Among these heartless or shameless coquettes, Clarence's heart was in no real danger, until he saw the widow of the Comte d'Enghien appear in the same circle.

At first, he was shocked by her apparent forgetfulness of the loss she

had sustained; for he had no intermediate idea of her between the hour he saw her a bride and the moment in which he met her again as a widow; the two points of time, therefore, seemed one in his mind. But two years had, in fact, elapsed since then; and she had no asssociation with his appearance to revive, in its latent force, the memory of her loss. On the evening of her marriage, she had never noticed Clarence, — he had not even been named to her; and, after the fall of her husband, no one had told her that Clarence had remounted the Prince at the hazard of his own safety. Afterwards, when the affecting circumstance was repeated to her, by way of bespeaking her gracious notice of the young Englishman, the sensibility with which she herself tearfully hinted at it, convinced him of the wrong he had done her.

Ardent, then, to repair such injustice, from that instant a species of sentimen-

tal friendship was established between them; love it was not; for his companionship with her husband, and the sacred kind of compassion with which Clarence had regarded her idea in his mind, put such a sentiment out of the question. But it was a feeling which gave fresh interest to every scene in which he met her; and perhaps it preserved him from the machinations of less disinterested characters.

A virtuous attachment, though it may be hopeless or misplaced, is not always to be deprecated for ingenuous youth, just launching into life; it is not unfrequently found to prove a shield against various temptations, and a powerful incentive to great and praiseworthy actions. And if we must make our choice between the chance of temporary depression for those we regard, and their heedless seizure of faulty pleasure, it seems more worthy of rational and accountable creatures to prefer the former than the

latter for those we love. Clarence, however, was not attached to the fair mourner beyond the measure of deep and respectful compassion.

Happily for Clarence, he was too ambitious of merited distinction to be captivated, for more than a moment, by games of chance: cards and dice, therefore, barely tempted him. He was to be attracted successfully only by the stimulus of allowable ambition. He, therefore, sought with avidity the martial sports provided for the chivalric spirits of her court by the accomplished Catherine de Medicis: in these, as has been observed, the graces and activity of his body distinguished him; while, in the gay *chasses* and select suppers of the Queen, the poignant originality of his thoughts, and the charm of his joyous temper, made him at once their ornament and their delight.

The freshness and purity of such a character as his, in the zone of such a

court, torrid with hidden fire, was like dew to the arid ground. Sometimes even his healthfulness of soul found this climate insupportable. Sometimes, too, the thought of Roche Blanc and Aigline de Venzéles would cross him like a pure and pleasant gale; and he would then stand fixed by the sweet remembrance, as the hot and dusty traveller rests himself under some spreading tree, enjoying its shade, and refreshing himself with its coolness.

The liberality of his father, on parting, had provided Clarence with ampler means than perhaps was wise in a parent to bestow upon a son ignorant of their use, and naturally inclined to give with both hands whatever others appeared to want. Mr. Willoughby had been all his lifetime more indulgent than wise, and this last kindly imprudence exposed his son to many dangers which he might otherwise have escaped.

When the young Englishman was supposed to possess a purse filled in proportion to his birth, not a few specious profligates and adventurers studied to make him their prey, by drawing him into a profusion of which they were either to share the pleasure or the distinction; and it was not till his funds were nearly drained, that he started to find himself on the brink of dependance upon the friends he lived with, unless an application to his father should supply future exigencies. He made this discovery in time; and the salutary horror he experienced at the view of degrading obligation (for is it not degrading to accept pecuniary assistance, because we would not deny ourselves the pleasures we could not afford?) prevented him from ever again placing himself in a similar predicament.

Against perils of this kind, his friend the Chevalier had warned him strongly,

though but in general terms; perhaps thinking his own example the best argument he could use. But Clarence's social temper, and adventurous spirit, carried him into various sets where de Bourbon never cared to go; and there, fascinated for awhile by the spells of talent or graces wasted in the mere effort of captivating enthusiastic youth for interested purposes, he frequently came away, politely pilfered of his money; losing with it, at the same instant, half his confidence in the semblances of his fellow-creatures.

He learned, however, one wholesome lesson by it, — that what he had hitherto called his pleasure in studying human character, was, in fact, only the habit of amusing himself with its varied surface; and he henceforth determined to look deeper.

Perhaps Clarence wished to make one exception to this resolution, in favour of his friend de Bourbon; for, instead of

steadily investigating his conduct and motives of action, he started as though he trod upon a serpent, whenever officious memory brought in any way before him the Chevalier's own confession, contrasted with those extravagant ideas of perfection with which Clarence had heretofore invested him. Was he indeed to believe, what the Chevalier implied, — that it was no magnanimous passion for the approval of his own mind, or the acclaim of generous contemporaries, which excited him to glory, but the pitiful stings of folly? was his disdain of pleasure, hitherto so sublime in the eyes of his idolater, nothing but an ill-controlled passion for objects more frivolous, — precedency and titles? and were his best qualities, then, but so many suits, to cover mortified self-love? These questions, the searching intellect of Clarence urged strongly, — but once: his heart silenced them that instant.

With the sophistry of a nature inclined to love much and love long, nay, to love for ever what it loved at all, Clarence persuaded himself that the Chevalier had done his own principles injustice; and that in describing vividly one doubtful motive of his many illustrious peculiarities, he had disdained to urge those praiseworthy ones, which every body must see and acknowledge. He even refused to believe, in its full extent, what de Bourbon one day laughingly assured him of, as coming from a court-supper, — that he might win and wear his uncle d'Enghien's interesting widow, if he chose; declaring, that when he (the Chevalier) wished to marry her as Marie d'Estonteville, he found his heart had less share in the hope than the prospect of obtaining the coveted legitimacy, through the weight of her great possessions, and the claims of her right Bourbon blood.

"At any rate, as I cannot marry my aunt—"

With this broken-off sentence, Adhemar had concluded; and that expression, coupled with the foregone phrase of "he feared," happily enabled Clarence to believe his friend too noble ever to have had the cruel intention of seeking an amiable young creature's affections, from purely selfish calculations.

Thus Adhemar kept his hold upon that frank and generous heart, in despite of his own unsuspected inferiority, and the continued difference of their opinions upon the one important subject.

After Clarence had been four months in the world of Paris, he protested to his friend that he did not find his views of honour and dishonour, of vice and virtue, in the least altered; yet he confessed that he sometimes had found himself tempted to sin against his principles. But as the principles themselves remained unaltered, in his eyes, he thought it

gave him a right to say, it was not possible for him to agree with the Chevalier, in thinking that any thing further was necessary for the latter's honour and happiness, than his own deserts and high reputation.

The Chevalier argued the subject no more; and Clarence then flattered himself, that he had in part convinced him. Accustomed to his silent acquiescence with many opinions and wishes of his, he never pressed a subject beyond a certain point: satisfied with his concurrence or his company, without any other concession.

Mutual complaisances benefited and delighted each. Clarence, secretly as ambitious of knowledge as of glory, without loving it as passionately, stole many hours from morning sleep, for the sake of accomplishing his mind into fit companionship with that of the widely-informed de Bourbon; and de Bourbon tore himself from unsocial studies and

bitter musings, that he might appear with Clarence in the circle at the Louvre, and enjoy his triumphs there.

In these circles, *the interesting* Limoges, and *the charming* Willoughby, were particularly distinguished. The former's cold abstraction of look. joined to a person otherwise remarkable for nobleness and grace, made him indeed an interesting object to the speculative or romantic: while the frank and naïve gaiety of the other, combined with his more engaging physiognomy and yet finer figure, rendered him charming to persons of a different taste.

Thus, neither interfering with, nor jealous of each other — nay, perhaps, unconsciously flattered by the increased estimation of the individual who prized them most highly — (for merit may be so reflected) — they went on, as closely linked in amity as before. Yet, it must be confessed, that the character of their mutual friendship had undergone a change.

With Clarence, it was no longer the blind enthusiasm and rash devotedness of inexperience; but those mixed sentiments of admiration and disapproval, consequent on more discerning and more manly sense. He was indeed forced to acknowledge, that his idol had "feet of clay" like the idols of other men; but then how matchless, he thought, was all the rest of its workmanship!

On the part of the Chevalier, it was a keener, almost a painful feeling. The wider he saw into Clarence Willoughby's heart, the nobler he thought it, the more dearly did he prize his own station there. But he felt that he owed that station to something of delusion; and he lived therefore in a feverish state, between the apprehension of forfeiting it wholly, and the impotent wish, that he could shake off the serpent desire which rendered that misfortune possible.

The strongest attachment and most perfect confidence may subsist between

persons of very different degrees of intellect; but inequality in moral attainments, renders a permanent bond chimerical.

Adhemar felt conscious, that to satisfy the desire which his distempered thoughts had nursed into a devouring passion, he would do much which Clarence Willoughby must condemn; perhaps abhor: and the presentiment that such a time would arrive, haunted him like some threatening spirit.

Clarence lived at the Hotel de Condé, and as Adhemar de Bourbon was his uncle's guest also, they were separated only when they chose to be so.

The Princess de Condé took little share in the dissipated amusements of the court. Solely devoted to her little sons, and satisfied with the privilege of loving her admired husband, she perhaps absented herself too much from those circles, in which the duties of his rank commanded him to appear.

Simple in her manners, and with a

countenance, of which the principal charm was an expression of kindness and goodness, she feared to enter the lists with women, in whom the insolence of beauty might be coupled with its fascination; and whose insiduous attacks upon her prince's heart, might be quickened by the pleasure of mortifying a virtuous wife and mother: as it was, her best and brightest sphere was certainly her own home; and there, instructing her children, or smilingly receiving her husband, Clarence Willoughby took pleasure in contemplating her. The character of this amiable women, was perhaps, not sufficiently what may be termed *picturesque*, for one of his age and temper to admire strongly; but it commanded his respect and engaged his esteem; and as such, he approached her with sentiments which made his appearance in her quiet evening circle always a pleasure to her.

How often when there, did he muse

upon the perversity of nature, which so frequently gives the greatest power of charming, to the most pernicious persons! In the prince's familiar levées were objects of greater interest: he saw there all the leading statesmen and warriors amongst the Hugonots; and acquired, therefore, clearer notions of the danger which had threatened their religious liberty from the ascendancy of the intolerant house of Lorraine.

A sincere Christian, though, perhaps, not a profound theologian, he partook of this party's joy, at the evident determination of the king to repress the insolence of the Duke de Guise; and he regretted, therefore, in common with them, the indiscreet resolution of Anthony of Navarre, not to appear at the nuptials of the Queen of Spain and Duchess of Savoy. His compliance on this occasion might have conciliated his royal kinsman into yet further support of the Bourbon princes, whom the Guises still seemed de-

termined to incense, by every species of studied and well-masked insult. To Condé, Montpensier, and Roche-sur-yon, their animosity was evinced, by daring attempts to invade their peculiar privileges; and by endeavouring to make the rank of their own high and numerous offices, equivalent to the inherent pretensions of the others.

To Adhemar de Bourbon, it appeared in the more galling shape of total disregard: affecting to consider him as nothing beyond the Vicomte de Limoges, ennobled by favor and subsequent merit, they contumeliously yielded to him that civility which they refused the real princes of the blood: and in so doing, mortified him to the quick. While they and their train struggled in all court ceremonies and public processions, for precedency, or at least equality, with those of the legitimate princes, they carelessly suffered Limoges and his followers to proceed, according to heraldic rule, while they stood proudly aloof, smiling

sarcastic condescension upon Adhemar's jaundiced cheek.

At times like these, Clarence felt his blood boil with indignation: and, become sensible how much such refinement in malice was capable of goading a spirit like that of the morbidly-sensitive Adhemar, he soon hated the Guise faction for his friend's sake;—twenty times was he on the point of a duel, in consequence.

The flaming resentment with which he beheld this contumely, quickened his zealous attempts at impressing the prince he now nominally served, with the necessity of procuring the royal grant, so much covetted by the Chevalier.

Any other than the amiable Condé, might have been displeased with these frequent representations; but Condé met the question as frankly as it was put; declaring, what was the fact, that he never lost sight of this object; believing it due to his nephew's great merits and

services: that he must, however, always consider private interests, subordinate to those of the public; and that consequently, until he had obtained from the king, that indulgence for the Protestants which they hoped to obtain, solely through the intercession of a prince near the throne, he could not — would not — urge any suit, peculiar to his own family.

Every day, as it obviously lessened the influence of the House of Lorraine, drew the prospect of succeeding in both suits nearer: Adhemar's friends, therefore, the prince said, must wait for that auspicious moment; and rest assured, that he would seize it for his nephew, with all the eagerness of sincere affection.

With this explanation Clarence was contented, and he strove to make his friend so too: but whether de Bourbon was so or not, he could not exactly ascertain; for in defiance of greater intimacy

and stricter friendship, the Chevalier still took refuge whenever he pleased, in his original reserve and coldness. Clarence, used now to this occasional humour, lamented it as one of the few infirmities of a character, which he kindly chose to think would not have been half so interesting, without those shades of imperfection. — He could have made up his mind to his friend's delayed gratification, had the mischief ended there: but suspecting that the canker of doubting his uncle's sincerity, still remained in the Chevalier's mind; and firmly believing Condé wronged by such a suspicion, he laboured to do the latter justice, by undeceiving the former. His just and generous heart, never dreamt that by those frequent eulogiums, he might be sowing the seeds of jealousy, in the bosom from which he would have weeded every failing. The situation of his own affairs raised his spirits too delightfully, not to cast its bright

hue over every other object of speculation.

His father's letters from England were animating: after much delay, occasioned, perhaps, as much by Mr. Willoughby's timidity, as by the queen's desire of averting, as long as possible, all matters of business likely to create feuds among the persons of her council at court, he had succeeded in obtaining permission to lay his mother's letters at her feet.

The queen had so far testified her satisfaction with the proofs contained in these letters, as to reject an application made by the Dudley family, praying a royal order for the person, styling himself Clarence Willoughby, at the Court of France, to discontinue quartering the arms of de la Pole with those of his reputed father. She had commanded Arthur de la Pole, and the Dudley's themselves, to abstain from all hindrance or molestation of either Mr. Willoughby: assuring each party of ultimate justice,

whenever more urgent matters would permit her to investigate the one in question. Meanwhile, Mr. Willoughby was allowed the usual facilities for accumulating the proofs of his marriage and his wife's change of religion; and at the same time, privately sounded concerning the strength of the Protestant party in France. Upon their ascendancy, Elizabeth calculated for strengthening her against the smothered enmity of Spain, and the deeper designs of the Queen of Scots.

Tutored by her maternal uncles, Guise and Lorraine, Mary had assumed the arms of England, immediately upon the death of her royal namesake: thus openly laying claim to the crown, and throwing upon its present possessor the ignominy of doubtful birth: it became policy, therefore, in Elizabeth, whose title to the sceptre she held, lay solely in the validity of her father's marriage, to support the religious doctrines which sanctioned his

disregard of Papal authority, and consequently rendered herself legitimate. With this view, she began privately to encourage the professors of Protestanism abroad, and warily to favour them at home; and as Clarence Willoughby's cause was evidently espoused by the head of the French reformation, she scrupled not to give his father those hopes in secret which animated, nay, in some measure, repaid his public mortifications.

There was a species of resemblance between the situation of Clarence and that of the queen, not displeasing to a person of her strangely compounded character: yet did it render the public discussion of the former's circumstances, until Elizabeth was firmly fixed on the throne, an act of such imprudence, that her ambassador at Paris was privily instructed to represent it to the Prince de Condé as one reason the more against her

speedy settlement of his young equerry's pretensions.

This communication, imparted to the subject of it, by Condé himself, with many gracious predictions, overjoyed Clarence even more for his father's sake, than for his own: and had the permission to join his father been coupled with it, his joy would have been complete. But this was still deemed rash and improper: and Clarence was therefore forced to console himself, for this continued separation, by believing what Mr. Willoughby asserted, that he was too busy for the indulgence of melancholy retrospection; that employment did him good; and that all the reward he asked for such resignation of his son's society, was the satisfaction of finding, when they were permitted to meet again, that Clarence had made good use of his time, and accomplished himself to a degree befitting his probable station and duties hereafter.

In these letters, Mr. Willoughby spoke of Roche Blanc and his old intimates there, with that sort of indulgent good-will, with which the kindly heart considers every familiar object, however perverse or common-place, when time and distance have softened their different peculiarities. He mentioned his dear Alouëtte (the name of endearment he was used to apply to Aigline) only once: but that so particularly, that Clarence felt justified in repeating it to her, as a testimony of unaltered affection.

To repeat that message in person, and refresh himself with scenes of nature and of peace, soon became the object of passionate desire to our hero. He felt anxious for some pause in the giddy round he was treading, that he might review his conduct and his companions, understand his own feelings, and ascertain his acquirements. This opportunity was happily afforded by the circumstances of those he lived with. While prepa-

rations were making for the nuptials of the two French princesses, the Prince de Condé proposed a short visit to Nerac, for the purpose of making a last attempt to open his brother's eyes to the impolicy of his present conduct.—If he could not induce Anthony to return with him to Paris for the approaching festivities, he trusted that he might, at least, win him to accept the offered honor of conducting Philip of Spain's bride to the frontiers of the two kingdoms. By such a condescension, he might, in all probability, avert the danger which threatened his Pyrenean dominions from that covetous monarch; and purchase a right of soliciting wide indulgence for the French king's subjects in Naverre's government of Guienne, and in his patrimonial demesnes.

Subjects of this kind, were too complicated and delicate for any other than private discussion: Condé, therefore, proposed giving a temporary *congé* to

such of his officers as belonged more immediately to his society; and Clarence Willoughby, coming under this denomination, gratefully accepted the opportunity it afforded him, of passing two or three weeks amongst the scenes and the friends of his boyhood.

A magnificent tournament in honor of the two marriages, was to be the rallying point of all the scattered noblesse of France. The monarch himself had announced his intention of exhibiting his skill and address in the lists: and the intermediate time which was destined to elapse between the actual performance of the nuptial rites, and this splendid exhibition, was left open to the different Chevaliers for accomplishing themselves in the exercises necessary to ensure either success or honorable defeat, and for the collection of their nobles and followers, to swell their train.

With a pardonable degree of impatience to witness a sight which was to

realize the heroic visions of his earliest years, and with the most determined resolution of daring all that others might dare on this occasion, Clarence set off, with a heart divided between affectionate yearnings, and ambitious aspirations, for the home he still loved; though it was no longer the residence of his father.

CHAP. V.

From the moment in which Aigline had communicated the intelligence of Clarence's probable arrival at L'étoile, Madame de Roche Blanc peremptorily forbade Lolótte to think of going thither. The exact period of his coming could not be ascertained, as that must depend upon the humour or convenience of the great personages with whom he was connected. But, as it was wisest to fancy the earliest time, the most likely, her daughters were immediately and properly commanded to confine their walks to the garden of the chateau, and the meadows by the river.

For three or four days, this was quietly

yielded to by Lolótte: but on the fifth, she contrived to evade the observation of her mother, who had taken her under her own charge, while Aigline was coaxing Cecile into a lesson, and on being missed, was sought through the house and adjacent places in vain.

Domestics were then dispatched in different ways to seek her; while Aigline, quick of apprehension, and light of foot, flew up the mountain paths that led to L'étoile. There, she felt sure of finding her sister; and thither she went with a confused feeling of dread and hope that Clarence Willoughby might be already there. Clarence by himself, would have been met as a friend or a brother, and hailed as a protector; but Clarence, surrounded by companions of foreign manners and appearance, for such she was aware Parisian courtiers must seem in her eyes, was an object of timid alarm. She therefore avoided the house, as she went through its labyrinth of groves and

glades, making her way circuitously to a favourite haunt of her own and Lolótte's.

This was a mass of ancient sculpture in stone, representing a groupe of Scripture figures dressed absurdly in the fashion of the days of Clovis, ill cut, and so defaced, that it was just possible to fancy them what the gothic artist intended, Pharaoh's daughter with her damsels, at the finding of Moses. As this time-worn mass stood at the bottom of a dell, remote from the mansion itself, and was fancifully overgrown with a variety of wild and clinging plants, it formed an object at once verdant and venerable. In winter its mosses and ivies kept it refreshingly green, when all else was bleak and bare; and, in summer, the profusion of blushing and scented creepers which insinuated their garlands amongst its ruder drapery, rendered it as fragrant as beautiful.

Under the shadow of this old monument, the sisters were accustomed to sit

in the sweet days of summer, pursuing their work or their lessons at its base, while the high trees above their heads shrouded them from the sun, and murmured of days long past to the thrilled ear of one.

To this spot Aigline now hastened. As she ascended the shaded wood path which conducted to it, she paused, and called softly on the name of Lolótte — the echoes only answered her. She then bounded up the ascent; and, breaking through the thick interlacement of boughs which almost excluded entrance, found herself in front of the monument, and in the midst of gaily-attired strangers.

Disordered with the haste and carelessness of her walk, her hat drawn half off her head by the trees she had pressed through, and her hair scattered from under it, she was little likely to suspect herself an object of admiration to the party before her. But that picturesque disorder of dress and hair, which she

blushed at, and that summer glow and transparency diffused through her complexion, which lends such a lustre to every stile of beauty, and now heightened the bashful brightness of her averted eyes, made her charming in the sight of five or six young men, all sated with practised or artificial beauty, in the court circles of Paris.

Some expressions of this admiration, perhaps bordering upon levity, burst from two of them; and one of the gayest, crossing Aigline's path as she would have retreated without speaking, conjured her to tell him whether she were wood-nymph or goddess, or the tutelary spirit of their friend Willoughby, or by what other name he must invoke her!

Aigline's terrified glance at first had ascertained that her friend Clarence was not amongst this party; but at a name ever coupled in her mind with ideas of protection, she rallied her coward spirits, articulating, though with difficulty, her

claim on his friendship, and her desire that he should be told she was there.

"Let me conduct you to the house, Madam!" said a young man of gentler speech than the first that had addressed her, "or will you allow me the honour of protecting you to your home? the Chevalier Willoughby is not at L'étoile just now."

"Not at L'étoile!" she repeated, in an agony of disappointment and fright; "what will become of —" and interrupting herself, she made another effort to pass her persecuting admirer.

"Never, yet, did woman sincerely avoid the devout adorer of her charms," exclaimed this persevering impertinent; "therefore, fair creature, in despite of Maligny, *I* claim the right of escorting you whither soever you wish to go."

Maligny with a smile, forcibly, though quietly, pushed him aside, and respectfully offering his arm to Aigline, assured her of protection, if she would honour

him with her commands; at the same time praying her to regard the inconsiderate levity of his companions as the consequence only of their high spirits, not an intentional insult to a defenceless woman. Maligny was one of those happy persons, upon whom nature bestows a powerful body, with a kindly heart, and a gracious temper: the commanding effect of the former never failed to enforce respect for the suggestions of the second; and the effect of both was infallible, when aided by that sweetness of manner which conciliated the very objects of his interference.

Re-assured by his engaging aspect as much as by his language, Aigline, who saw she needed a protector, was just hesitating how to accept his arm without an appearance of forwardness, when a step, a voice behind, made her look back; she turned, and her eyes met those of Clarence. Springing overjoyed to her side, he half-extended his arms;

but instantly recollecting himself, with some of that presence of mind which the world had taught him he checked the impulse, inquiring whether she were accompanied by the Baron, and whither she was going.

A few whispered words from her, and one or two distincter ones from Maligny, explained the circumstances under which Clarence found her: he did not hesitate, therefore, telling his idle guests to amuse themselves as they could, while he escorted M'amselle de Venzéles to her home. Little aware of the alarm given her by Beaurevoir, even while thanking Maligny for his momentary protection of her, he hurried her at once from the scene.

With the eagerness of friendship ever anxious to demonstrate its sincerity and warmth, he assured her, that having arrived only late the preceding night, he was already on his way to Roche Blanc, whither Maligny supposed him actually

gone; and Clarence would have taken the immediate road to it now, had not Aigline withheld him, faltering out the name of her sister, and her fears on her account. Clarence, unconscious of Lolótte's distressing deficiency of intellect, treated the apprehension with kind raillery; returning to the expression of his delight in seeing Aigline again, and to communications about his father. But Aigline's joy at sight of this earliest of her friends, was cruelly damped by the previous flutter of spirits into which she had been thrown by his companions; and by the bitter avowal she had to make of her sister's imbecility.

Perplexed, agitated, overcome with surprise, pleasure, and pain, she endeavoured to explain Lolótte's state to Clarence, that he might not be shocked by it as she herself had been; — but the task was beyond her present strength; and, abruptly leaving it unfinished, she burst into tears.

Quite unable to comprehend the cause of this emotion, Clarence seated her and himself upon a fallen ash which bordered their path, and endeavoured to soothe, ere he should question her further. The sound of that dear, familiar voice, now so tenderly compassionate; the sight of that gladdening countenance, now so expressive of kindly apprehension, were not calculated to still Aigline's emotion: though, perhaps, they changed its character. She wept no longer from painful embarrassment, but from pure delight: and, it was not till several minutes had elapsed, in the delicious and silent enjoyment of feeling herself by the side of Clarence Willoughby, that she recovered power and resolution to tell him every thing about her sister.

Clarence was shocked beyond expression at this unforeseen confidence: yet he managed to smother his horror, and express a hope that Lolótte's case was not hopeless. Aigline's eyes again glit-

tered like themselves, while he spoke. Ever accustomed to make Clarence her oracle, she welcomed his cheering predictions and arguments now with one of those rapid transitions of feeling, not unfrequent with her, whose grief or gladness almost always depended upon the looks or words of those she loved. She promised to hope, because he bade her: yet, repeating her anxiety to find her sister, lest some unlucky chance might throw her in the way of his gay company.

Clarence professed himself ready to go any where with her, or without her, as she might think best; but Aigline, who had some womanish fears for herself, though she did not give them utterance, proposed their going together to another favourite haunt of the wanderer.

This was a natural well of remarkably clear and cold water, in one of the numerous grottoes round L'étoile; frequently resorted to by Lolótte, for the sake of

washing the pebbles and mosses, which she amused herself by collecting. To reach this grotto by the shortest way possible, Clarence proposed crossing the lower end of the garden, or rather that part of the domain where the elevation of the garden formed an absolute rampart or wall, whence there was no descent, except a flight of broad steps cut in the earth, and covered with moss.

Thither Aigline suffered herself to be led by Clarence; while she hung on his arm, her thoughts, her conversation, her heart, divided between the absent Mr. Willoughby and the wandered Lolótte.

Clarence, not so agitated, though more profoundly affected than herself, (for what he had just heard was new to him,) tried to quiet her perturbation by a calmness of manner very different from his ordinary vivacity of expression. As they were passing the terrace just described, he glanced towards it, to see if a favorite peacock, the charge of his boyish days,

were there, as formerly, sunning its gorgeous plumage on the highest level. The bird was seated there; and, far below, lay Lolótte, asleep on one of the green steps; her cheek resting upon her polished arms, and both sunk deep in the bedded flowers she had been gathering.

The light summer wind that lifted her shining hair was scattering these heaped-up flowers over her own figure, and that of a young man, who, resting on one knee by her side, was gazing at her, as though uncertain whether she were of this world, or not. This person raised his head, at the sound of footsteps; and Clarence's anxious eyes met the dark and deeply-expressive ones of Adhemar de Bourbon. An arrow could not have pierced Clarence's heart quicker, or surer: he felt that his friend was lost, if this were Lolótte. And eagerly enquiring if it were, and scarcely waiting to hear the tremulous "*yes*," he sprang

from Aigline to the Chevalier, and forcibly drew him from his dangerous station.

The movement about her, awoke Lolótte rather hastily; but seeing only Aigline, for Clarence and de Bourbon had removed themselves, her awaking was not followed by any fantastic terrors. If she remembered that she had played truant from this dear sister, the remembrance gave her no concern; for she began talking of her flowers, and the places she had gathered them in, with the eagerness and simplicity of a child.

Aigline was anxious to get her away; and gently reminding her, that she had done wrong in quitting the chateau alone, besought her to return immediately, for the sake of quieting her mother's fears. But Lolótte was in a mood of sportive provokingness; and she fell into a gay transport at her sister's evident perturbation, while she herself was affecting to collect her scattered flowers, and

to follow those the wind blew from her, with arch assumption of anxiety.

Aigline's disturbance increased as she observed that Clarence and the stranger had retreated only a few paces from them, into the shade of some trees; and though concealed from Lolótte by their situation, were visible to her. The one apparently talking with peculiar earnestness; the other watching every movement of the unconscious Lolótte.

In a few minutes Clarence came forward alone; and Aigline, with a countenance full of her agitated heart, put her arm round the startled Lolótte, and whispered his name. A name, she had so often loved to repeat to this poor thing, doubtful, as she ever was, whether it would be followed by any idea.

Lolótte just glanced her starry eyes at Clarence, and dropt them instantly, her whole face suffusing with lovely confusion. If she had appeared beautiful before to Adhemar de Bourbon, how

much more so did she appear at this moment; while, throwing herself upon her sister's neck, she tried to hide her face there, in true maiden shame. Clarence thought her beautiful beyond all that he had believed it possible for a living creature to realize; but the slenderer form, trembling with emotion, which supported hers, — the tearful eyes that tenderly regarded her, — the vibrating colour of that cheek, which the joy of seeing him had covered so lately with the liveliest crimson, — these charms of sensibility, endeared by many an association, were to Clarence more interesting, more absorbing, than all the glow and exquisiteness of Lolótte.

He drew near Aigline, apologizing in a low voice for the perplexity he was about to cause her, since he must entreat her, if she accepted his escort back to Roche Blanc, to permit his illustrious friend to accompany them. The accidental circumstances under which they

had met, the necessity of her having some protection home, and the observances due to the Chevalier's rank, would, Clarence hoped, acquit her to her mother from any blame. Aigline had already comprehended who was his companion, and the enthusiasm for his friend's character which Clarence himself had formerly taught her, now contributed to heighten her natural embarrassment and agitation in such a presence. What would she not have given for the power of wafting poor Lolótte away, and being left herself, to the unconstrained enjoyment of this unexpected introduction. She dreaded her mother's displeasure, and she feared that Lolótte's eccentricities would discover themselves during this walk; yet, protection was necessary for them both.

While she hesitated how to answer, Clarence renewed his entreaty, adding, in a yet lower tone, "If you wish me to preserve de Bourbon's friendship-

Aigline! — he doubts my motive, I see, for wishing to tear him from this danger. He cannot believe your sister's mind less lovely than her person. Perhaps his future peace may depend on being convinced —"

Aigline now comprehended what he meant; and, while her humid eyes were raised to his, with a look which went to his heart, she said, "O, Clarence! you can guess what I feel just now; but if another's peace is in question" — it was needless to say more; a sign from the impetuous Clarence brought the Chevalier to their side.

Lolótte, who had espied him during this conversation, while she hung on her sister's shoulder, attracted by the jewelled band of his feathered cap, and the sparkling collar of his order, now raised her head with childish curiosity. Perhaps, equally struck by the noble sobriety of his mien, and the dark beauty of his countenance.

Never, indeed, had even Clarence seen his friend to such advantage. The depth and vivacity of the Chevalier's feelings was visible in his heightened colour, though not in his manner. The action of lifting off his cap on being named to the daughters of Baron Roche Blanc, displayed the form of his head and disposition of his hair, both of which were remarkably fine, and the distinguished fashion of his dress and mantle, completed that look of the Prince, which was indeed perfected now, by a graceful hesitation of address, which softened the haughtiness, and warmed the coldness of his ordinary manner.

Lolótte evidently looked at him with some unknown feeling, which made her insensible to her former habit of shy unsociableness. Her eye followed him as he approached her sister; and, when he drew beside herself, she blushed, smiled, and averted her head; yet held out her hand with interesting hesitation.

The smile was so sweet, the action so flattering yet so innocently performed, that de Bourbon, who was, in truth, strangely incredulous of his friend's forced account of her, respectfully took that offered hand, and pressed his lips on its soft down, with a fervour beyond the ordinary expression of such courtesies.

Aigline, embarrassed by the restraint imposed on her by the Chevalier's rank, and by her uncertainty whether she were right or wrong in thus exposing her poor sister's misfortune for the sake of sparing a stranger's possible feelings, trembled, and blushed, and faltered, with a confusion not only pardonable, but lovely, at seventeen. This confusion so completely destroyed her presence of mind, that as they all turned in the direction of Roche Blanc, she had not courage to withdraw Lolótte from the Chevalier, who had respectfully, but determinately drawn her arm through his, evidently decided to ascertain, from his own immediate ob-

servation, whether she were or were not misrepresented to him.

The sudden and powerful feeling which had now taken possession of de Bourbon, certainly gifted him with instant knowledge of the best way to win Lolótte's confidence; for when she would have retreated from him in a fit of awakening timidity, he gently won her to stay, by calling her attention to the flowers she was dropping from the scarf in which she had collected them; and by assisting her to remove from the chance of destruction, the creeping insects which occasionally crossed their path, and which Lolótte, with curious tenderness, shrunk from injuring. Still, however, she spoke not; and the Chevalier, beholding none but sweet or bashful expressions on that ravishing countenance, was sensible to such maddening admiration that its very excess recalled his senses.

"If she were, indeed, as charming as lovely," thus he said to himself, "what

could the daughter of a petty Bearnese nobleman be to the nephew of the King of Navarre? and, if the account given by Clarence Willoughby of her imperfect faculties has only been a lover's stratagem to preserve her for himself, what ought she to be to that lover's friend?"

Adhemar de Bourbon had never been in love. Something extraordinary was necessary to call forth the sensibility of a heart, like his, suspicious of others, and afraid of itself. In the world of Paris, he went forth prepared to encounter and to resist the attacks of artifice or beauty: here he was met unarmed; and the extreme youth, bashfulness, and evident confidingness of Lolótte, added to her dazzling beauty, were, therefore, irresistible. Yet incredulous of his own feelings, even in this tempest of so many, he had not force to tear himself away at once from the charm which bound him.

While he continued to lead her sister forward, remarking upon the scenery and

the season to one that only murmured a monosyllable, Aigline missed the happiness she had promised herself with Clarence when this second return of his was in prospect. She was no longer the childish, and, as she now thought, the happy Aigline, with no harder duties to perform than those of hand-service to a peevish child, for whom any hired servant might have performed the same offices with equal fitness. At this period her heart, her thoughts, her attention, were all claimed by her unfortunate sister: Clarence Willoughby might no longer be all to her; and the pleasure of studying his wishes, and the delight of enjoying his conversation, must henceforth give way to a more sacred duty, and a dearer desire.

Aigline almost chid herself for the keen interest with which she had regarded his countenance for a moment, while he was looking from her to his friend. That countenance was changed:

that merely open, and animated look, was ennobled by other expressions, of greater depth and interest. His eyes were no longer simply "like clearest streams reflecting bluest skies:" clouds and sunshine were alternate there; evidencing more thought and wider sensibilities. There was no longer that decided difference between the sun-burnt cheek and the exceedingly white forehead, which distinguished Clarence during his mountain life: his complexion was now better harmonized and more polished; his movements less rapid, therefore more graceful. Every thing, in short, about his face and figure, spoke of greater refinement and more developed mind: yet as the warm and generous heart shone there, too, Aigline knew not how to regret this sudden alteration from youth to manhood. Still, however, she was perplexed to guess why this change should be, after but six months' absence, when he had formerly been away three times as long,

and returned unaltered. Aigline was too inexperienced herself, to reflect that six months passed in the capital of a great kingdom, where we either feel in our own persons, or behold in those of others, every passion of the soul exerted by every variety of event, is equal to six years spent among one set of persons, and in one line of action.

She dwelt on her own observation but a moment; for Clarence was anxious to engage her attention to his regret at their meeting under such embarrassing circumstances; and she was more anxious to withdraw Lolótte from her interesting companion. She thought she had now done enough to satisfy Clarence's solicitude for his friend's conviction; and, approaching the latter, she besought his pardon if she declined the honour of his attendance, and hurried her sister home to relieve their mother's apprehensions.

At this entreaty, the Chevalier reluctantly stopt; and Aigline, perceiving that

Lolótte held in her hand, and was eagerly admiring, the shells of gems composing his order, which the Chevalier had probably taken from his neck in obedience to her wishful looks, now endeavoured to obtain it from her, that it might be returned. But at this attempt, though most gently made, Lolótte's deceptious silence concluded; and the half-wild, half-senseless expressions she uttered about the ornament itself, its wearer, and her mother, tore the veil at once from de Bourbon's eyes. He shuddered back, hurrying out an agitated entreaty that Lolótte should not be further importuned.

Observing the changed expression of his countenance, yet incapable of understanding the mystery of feelings expressed by this change, Lolótte uttered a piercing cry; and, flinging down the contested jewels, fled at once into the woods.

"Follow her not!" exclaimed Aigline, forgetting the ceremonials of life, and

putting back the Chevalier with her hand. "I must seek my poor sister alone. Clarence, you will follow us; so that I may call to you, if any alarm —"

"I will, I will, Aigline!" Clarence hastily answered. The next instant she was gone, like a frighted dove, down the wood-path by which Lolótte had vanished. Clarence, then turning to the Chevalier, enquired whether he chose to go forward with him, or return to L'étoile alone?

"I ought to ask your pardon, dear Willoughby," said the other, removing his hands from his eyes, over which he had clasped them in sudden horror when he heard the shriek of Lolótte. "I could not credit any testimony, except what I have just witnessed. Good God, what a cruel fate for such a creature! I certainly never saw beauty before — or, I never felt it."

The emphasis de Bourbon laid upon the last smothered expression, was en-

forced by the profound sigh which accompanied it.

"For your sake, then, dear Adhemar," replied Clarence, unconsciously using this familiar mode of address to him for the first time, "this poor girl's misfortune is perhaps a blessing."

"May be so," returned the Chevalier, his cheek blanching even while he affected something of carelessness in his tone; "therefore you may go to Roche Blanc without me." He turned from him as he spoke; and Clarence then hastened to follow Aigline, directed in his path by the light print of her foot on the damp moss-walks along which she was flying.

By the time he reached her, she had found and soothed her sister, whose innocent heart was throbbing with the fear of having displeased de Bourbon. Aigline motioned Clarence to a distance; and still soothing Lolótte with assurances of the Chevalier's kind feelings towards

her, proceeded to beguile her down the mountain.

Having watched the sisters completely beyond the limits of those upper regions, until he saw them entering the lesser domain of their house, Clarence turned back, with a confusion of head and heart, to which his happy temperament was rarely subject; distinctly sensible only to sincere regret, for having so heedlessly invited a party of idle courtiers into the neighbourhood of his early friends. Even in Paris, Clarence had accustomed himself to think of Aigline de Venzêles but as he had used to do in their childish days; and he was now only beginning to feel as affectionate brothers do, when their sisters approach the age of charming—that her youth, sensibility and loveliness, demanded care and respect.

Of Lolótte he thought with less interest, though with great pity and lively admiration; and he saw the necessity of getting rid of his guests, upon her ac-

count, as quickly as possible. Clarence had lived the last few months in Paris; and those months had taught him fears and solicitudes, which, in his former state of happy ignorance, were unknown to him for himself as for others. Jealous now of a breath that might pass lightly over Aigline, he was disturbed how to account for her appearance alone in his father's domain, since he had no intention of describing Lolótte, and detailing her truantry; but the whole business was settled for him long before he reached L'étoile.

His lively guests had gone back to the house on his quitting them, to question the servants upon the nature of the bright vision they had seen their master disappear with. No one there knew any reason for concealing what they supposed the fact, and they consequently gave the enquirers complete satisfaction.

The description of Lolótte's beauty and

imbecility, painted with the extravagance of vulgar pencils, convulsed Beaurevoir with laughter, while it excited either romantic or idle curiosity in others. Maligny alone protested that he would do much to avoid viewing so painful a sight as that of every outward attraction, joined to such lamentable incapacity of mind. He was endeavouring to dissuade his companions from attempting to see this object of unjustifiable curiosity, and doing it with that good-humoured address for which he was remarkable, when the appearance of the Chevalier, more abstracted and stately than usual, awed the most tumultuous spirits into silence.

Maligny lost not a moment in repeating what they had just heard; amiably anxious to have some orders issued which might prevent any inflammable gallant present, from scheming himself into the seclusion of Roche Blanc. De Bourbon was himself too much interested in poor Lolótte, and too much vexed, to venture

other reply than his ordinary grave, yet courteous bend of the head. Emboldened by his silence, some of the younger men began proposing different stratagems for getting a peep at the beautiful insensible, in defiance of her mother's precautions, and of seeing her nymph-like sister again; railling in good set terms at Willoughby, for having kept the existence of two such charming creatures a secret. The fading and flushing of the Chevalier's dark cheek, meanwhile, did not escape the keen eye of Beaurevoir; but whether that were the consequence of displeasure at his friend Clarence for equal concealment with him as with others, or whether the cold hero had already seen and fallen a victim to the marvellous charms of M'amselle la Marot, was a problem to him. The mystery was not solved, when the Chevalier, rising abruptly, as if he had not been attending to any of the foolish quixotisms proposed by his companions, said authoritatively, "Beaurevoir,

see that my people are ready for me at any moment—it is likely I may leave this to-morrow."

With what degree of vexation or indifference this was heard by the rest of the party, is needless to inquire: suffice it, that Beaurevoir, conscious there was something more than caprice under it, and aware how far he might go upon a different track, so long as he appeared thrown off that which the Chevalier chose not to have followed, now burst forth in ludicrous lamentation of the disappointment he should sustain, if he must quit the neighbourhood of Roche Blanc without seeing that preposterous fool, its Baron.

"You, gentlemen," he exclaimed, bowing ruefully round, "may bewail the picquant amusement of knocking Willoughby's boars and deer on the head; or that of turning the heads of two Pyrenean beauties; though the one, they

say, has no head to turn; and, if Maligny's knight-errantry has done the mischief he intended, the other has, by this time, no heart; you may bewail this disappointment: — I, rend my whiskers, and strew ashes over my best bonnet, in despair of a different character. The perfection I hoped to see, was that perfect coxcomb, their father! The exercise I anticipated, was measureless laughter at his preposterous nonsense. — Well, Monsieur le Vicomte! if I am found suspended to one of these owl-haunted trees, or hurried down these falls of mud and rubbish, which Signior Willoughby is pleased to denominate *the* cataract, I call my companions to witness at whose door will lie the crime of my self-slaughter!"

With something between a smile of disdain and one of satisfaction, at the turn given to his thoughtless party's ideas, the Chevalier moved away without

speaking. At that instant the entrance of Clarence drew the flame of smothered vexation upon him.

Attacked at once by so many, Clarence owned, with his customary frankness, what he would not have volunteered imparting without some justifiable motive, Lolótte's affliction, and his strong interest in her for her family's sake: demanding respect for her from his giddy guests, with that resolute determination of enforcing it if necessary, which became his character. Beaurevoir's penetration for once deceived by his own want of heart, so completely mistook that generous pity which prompts men to draw a respectful veil over human infirmity, for a selfish passion, and so wholly mistook the Chevalier's embarrassed effort to conceal his having seen Lolótte, for struggling curiosity and an inflamed fancy, that he secretly believed Clarence Willoughby sought to keep this luckless beauty even from his friend's eyes; and,

that, consequently, to make the one jealous, and draw the other into a temptation, would be mighty pretty amusement. His triumph and his expectation were perfect, when he discovered from Clarence's ingenuous conversation that de Bourbon had just seen Lolótte.

The Chevalier could not quell the blood in his cheek when this discovery was made; and this evident confusion, added to his previous reserve, made more than Beaurevoir think that their stoical lord's *hour was come*; and that this amazing beauty had inspired him with a sudden passion. Ever since the mortifying check given his jests by Clarence's well-exerted spirit in the tennis-court at Nerac, Beaurevoir had smarted under the recollection of the Prince de Condé's avowed preference of this young intruder's conduct on that occasion, and he only waited his moment for repaying the mortification in kind. Yet had Beaurevoir so ably concealed his malignity, and

masked his most determined batteries of injurious insinuation, under an air of mere badinage, that Clarence, perhaps from not caring enough for him to look narrowly into the meaning of his railleries, never felt a momentary prick from one of them; but went on, quite unconscious of the petty ill-offices which his friend, as our associates are all called, was covertly trying to do him amongst their mutual acquaintances.

Young, handsome, clever, and entertaining, flattered for illustrious lineage, and pitied for lack of fortune, Beaurevoir was upon the surface something of what Clarence Willoughby was in reality. His untired spirits passed current for perpetual good humour; his wanton disclosures for giddy indiscretion; and his sharp wit exerted without mercy, but with admirable policy, upon every object of a new intimate's contempt or aversion, gave him immediate claims upon the latter's partiality. Most persons were long of

reflecting that he would offer them up in their turn, if need were, to gratify others; and he was, therefore, always sure of a succession of admirers. So little suited for companionship with Adhemar de Bourbon's character, it may seem strange that Beaurevoir should have retained the post he held, (that of gentleman of his chamber,) so long as he had done; but, in truth, he was too amusing, to be spared from such a household as that of the Vicomte de Limoges, which was rather stately than gay. The liveliest of the Chevalier's party at Escalette, where Clarence first met him, and of those with him now, belonged to the Prince de Condé; so that, except Clarence Willoughby himself, and this unsparing jester, de Bourbon carried no joyous spirits with him into the court circle. It was not his interest, therefore, to part with Beaurevoir; whose mocking wit often made a successful diversion for his lord, when the latter was em-

barrassed by his constitutional fear of being sounded too deeply, and whose quick tact told him when such interference would be acceptable. Beaurevoir, consequently, felt privileged to take some liberties with de Bourbon, which he would not otherwise have hazarded; though, at the same time, his eager hope of future advancement, should his master make a brilliant marriage, or rise to some distinguished post, kept his impertinence sufficiently in check, to prevent him from ever making it a necessity for the Chevalier to dismiss him.

Desirous of fomenting the suddenly-conceived passion of the Chevalier for the beautiful Lolótte, without which rivalry on Clarence's part would be of no consequence, Beaurevoir now hit on an expedient for effecting this. He proposed sending an invitation to the Baron de Roche Blanc, to show himself amongst them at L'étoile, if they were not permitted to visit him at his chateau;

humbly suggesting to the Chevalier, that Willoughby owed the peace-offering of such an exquisite treat, to a set of young enthusiasts in beauty, whom he was most arbitrarily defrauding of their right to admire its perfection: adding, that if Monsieur le Vicomte expected him to quit that mountain at a moment's warning, without kicking against the order like a fractious child, he must gratify his pardonable desire of comparing Clarence Willoughby's portrait of the Baron, with the rare original.

Maligny seconded this motion; not only because he was both young and light-hearted enough to enjoy the ridiculous himself, but that he thought a visit from the Baron the most easy mode of furnishing amusement to the discontented, and so preventing the probability of their roving about in search of adventures, which might have disagreeable consequences if Baron de Roche Blanc's daughters were made the heroines of

them, and Clarence Willoughby resented it.

This opinion, said in a low voice to the Chevalier, determined his hesitation, and he gave permission to have the Baron invited.

Such exercises as were named amongst the sports destined to precede the tournament at Paris, had become objects of daily practice to the youth emulous of distinction upon that occasion; and, as Clarence had formerly described amongst the Baron de Roche Blanc's vanities, that of exalting himself above all the gallants of his time, in the usage of the rapier and the spear, it was voted that he should not only be asked to their early supper, but invited to share their afternoon exercises. The whole party enchanted themselves with the hope of witnessing some memorable foolery of this prodigious blockhead's.

An invitation sent and accepted, and soon followed up by the appearance of

La Marot himself, drove every other idea out of the giddiest heads. For once, expectation was outdone. Baron de Roche Blanc was supremely ridiculous. Intoxicated with the honour of being admitted to the private society of a Bourbon, and ravished with such an opportunity of proving that he had once stood on the threshold of Henry d'Albret's court, he bowed till his back was almost past recovery; retreating, fronting the awful face of "Monseigneur" as he persisted in calling the Chevalier, at the risk of being precipitated down every rock in their way to the ground of exercise.

Here the first failure of Beaurevoir's mocking expectations occurred. The Baron was not to be prevailed upon by any orator of inferior rank than the Vicomte de Limoges himself, to exhibit his poor skill in such illustrious games, and the Chevalier was not inclined so to level himself with madcaps and jesters.

Beaurevoir, however, made exquisite sport of the Baron's florid compliments, adroitly pursuing his own little private plan, in occasional whispers. This was to embolden La Marot to solicit the Chevalier's presence at some feast or exhibition at the chateau, and thus prompt him to sacrifice the privacy of his daughters to his own vanity. He insinuated, that nothing could flatter the Chevalier like the wish of so accomplished a person as the Baron de Roche Blanc, to witness his graceful address again in similar exercises; hinting, that although Monsieur le Vicomte was cold as a stone to beauty as an object of passion, it was so agreeable to his sight as a man of taste, that nothing could be more likely to rivet the inclination which Beaurevoir said he perceived his lord had taken for the Baron's society, than an opportune introduction of the latter's singularly-beautiful family. The hint was not thrown away upon the vain gull to whom it was

addressed; and, before La Marot quitted L'étoile, he had so vehemently importuned Clarence Willoughby to solicit his noble friend to confer the everlasting distinction of a visit upon his chateau, ere he departed from its neighbourhood, that Clarence, after many efforts to excuse himself from urging such a petition, was at length forced to yield.

The Chevalier, perhaps secretly glad of an excuse to look on the beautiful Lolótte once more, in despite of his better reason, hesitatingly consented; little aware that the whole party at L'étoile were expected to give pomp to his own appearance. On finding them included in the invitation, de Bourbon, just because he was conscious of the wish to do so, had not courage to retract his consent, or say he chose to go unattended: he felt certain that to such a set, no father of ordinary feeling would expose the lovely unfortunate who called him by that name; and his countenance

expressed the chagrin this conviction caused him.

More intoxicated with this last mark of favor, La Marot became more outrageously ridiculous after supper than he had been before; he overflowed with complaisance and absurdity. Chanted, recited, narrated, exhibited tricks of legerdemain, and feats of personal dexterity, which had once sat well enough upon a good-looking young man in the high-day of life, but which now gave to the same person the appearance of the miserable stroller who is forced to gain his bread in age as in youth, by exhibitions revolting to the saddened spirit of the former period.

Peals of more abundant laughter than had once shaken the same party in the old tower of Escalette, now resounded through the hall of L'étoile; its present master no longer heard them with such free soul and hearty participation as he had done then: for then, the objects of

mirth were general, or the subjects of it joined in the gay sporting with their own peculiarities. Now, the sole victim was a conceited person mistaking ridicule for admiration: and, whether it were because this person was connected with old associations; or that Clarence was become more delicate in his feelings towards another; or because he was so truly of English breed that he would not let any thing, however remotely connected with himself, be laughed at, or reviled; he felt rather inclined to quarrel with those that jested at his neighbour, than to abet their treachery. Hitherto he had sat unusually silent from inward despite and self-blame: but, as the repentant feeling increased, he roused himself, shook off his inertness, and becoming all at once determined on pleasing, successfully managed to kindle every spirit with a purer flame.

Franker mirth succeeded; nobler subjects were discussed, or gracefully sported

with: the Baron, from enacting a buffoon part, became one of the audience, nay, enjoyed the flashes of his young friend's wit, and the traits of character he painted with the rapidity and brightness of the torrent which was heard dashing without; while Beaurevoir, who in vain sought to bring every one back to the ignoble sport of urging forward an unsuspecting fool, was perforce thrown into the background.

Adhemar de Bourbon, still obviously abstracted, had taken little share in the diversion of his company; but La Marot, relying on the mischievous whispers of Beaurevoir, believed that sober sadness part of a princely garb; and, far from being awed by his silence, like all vulgar souls when the first dazzlement of greatness has ceased, became flippant and familiar. It was partly an apprehension of seeing the Chevalier's patience fail, and his pride outraged by this presumption, which finally urged Clarence to dis-

lodge the Baron from his triumphant car, and take the reins of conversation into his own hands. He was sincerely glad, therefore, when de Bourbon suddenly rose from table, and broke up the party. The Baron's florid gratitude for the expected visit of the next day was then repeated, and a late hour after noon was fixed.

Their self-idolizing victim had scarcely disappeared, ere their usual chorus of laughter burst from all he left behind. Clarence rated both himself and his guests for such inhuman mirth; while Bourevoir persisted in thanking him for the entertainment he had so cordially provided for them; and the Chevalier, by an expressive glance, assured him that these giddy heads should have no opportunity of enjoying such diversion again.

The plan of operations for the next day was then arranged. It was settled that either Willoughby's dogs or hawks were to be tried, previous to the visit

at Roche Blanc, in an opposite direction; Beaurevoir himself suggesting the good nature and policy, if they wished for more entertainment, of making their visit as late as possible, in order to allow the pleased Baron time for preparation. The Chevalier smiled at this; inwardly conscious of an intention to defeat the whole scheme of his curious or mischievous companions, and sanctioning Beaurevoir's proposal, retired to his chamber.

CHAP. IV.

Previously instructed by de Bourbon, Clarence, on the following morning, provided amusements for each of his visitors; beseeching Maligny to engage Beaurevoir at chess, the latter being a keen player of the game: then, professing himself at the Chevalier's command for their usual early ramble, went out with him to the riding-house, where Godefroi waited, by appointment, for the honour of kissing the hand of a Bourbon.

Long ago acquainted by Clarence of the old man's devotion to their House, of which he was a pensioner, and pleased to receive some testimony of that enthusiasm for himself which had first awakened it in Clarence's breast, the Chevalier mixed too much graciousness with his

habitual reserve, not to win the veteran's heart, and warm him into many a recital of family histories, interesting to his auditor. The grasp which de Bourbon gave the old soldier's hand as he left a purse of gold in it, at parting, was "dearer than gold" to him that received it; and Clarence's glance told the venerable friend of his boyhood, how much this action gratified him also.

Perhaps the Chevalier was not displeased at overhearing Godefroi tell Clarence, that his noble friend had the countenance of his father's House, and the mien of his mother's: for the countenance expresses the character: and of the race of Guise it had been said, that in their presence, other princes looked like the multitude. With a courteous farewell to the veteran, unattended, and habited only in his hunting suit, Adhemar de Bourbon took the road to Roche Blanc. De Bourbon, owning no stronger motive for surprising the lord

of the chateau than disinclination to have the wearisome mockery of the preceding night repeated; and Clarence, though suspecting a livelier feeling behind this, lenient to its momentary indulgence, because he felt certain that his friend would act as he had said, and quit the neighbourhood the ensuing morning.

The dismay occasioned by their appearance may be imagined. To behold *Monseigneur* the Vicomte de Limoges walking into the common sitting-room of the chateau, without any ceremonial, when so many were in preparation, was a death-blow to expectation! The poor Baron had wasted one half of the night in fruitless endeavours to persuade his wife to join in making himself and herself ridiculous; and the other half in scribbling mottoes, and executing devices for the *salon*, in which the collation he proposed giving the prince, (as he persisted in calling him,) was to be laid out.

Had there been time for even a winged chariot to have summoned his little son from Tholouse, he would certainly have been tortured into the form of a Glory or a Cupid, to have recited vile verses, and crowned their expected hero with gilded laurels. Happily, this brilliant idea could not be accomplished; and the Baron's fête was destined to no higher embellishments than a few hastily-collected emblems; a profusion of plate and eatables, placed under a canopy of faded velvet; and a crowd of people pressed into old and new liveries, judiciously sorted for fore-ground and back-ground figures, according to the gloss and date of their raiment.

Madame de Roche Blanc, though aware of the importance it might be to her children to cultivate the favor of one so highly born as their expected visitor, resolutely resisted her husband's entreaty that she would permit her second daughter to be visible when the Chevalier and his

party came. She, therefore, resolved that Lolótte should be amused by Thomasine in a remote wing of the chateau, while its reluctant mistress and her eldest daughter were doing the honours to their awful guest.

Bitter, most bitter, were the feelings of Aigline upon this occasion. Hitherto, it seemed to herself, she had scarcely felt her sister's sad outlawry from all the hopes and enjoyments of youth: until this moment, indeed, never had that exclusion been pressed upon her conviction with such painful force; and she was sitting tearfully assisting Lolótte to arrange fresh mulberry leaves under her silk-worms, while their parents were still wrangling the question of who was, and who was not, to be present on the occasion, when the door of the apartment opened, and the Vicomte de Limoges was announced.

In the confusion and perturbation of that moment, every body belonging to

the chateau evidently lost their head. The Baron certainly saw a vision of this prince of the blood, with a long train of courtiers behind him, for he raved to that effect; while Madame la Baronne began hastily arranging the just-untwisted ringlets of her darling Cecile's hair; and Aigline rose trembling before her sister, as though she would have screened her from unfeeling curiosity.

Seeing the door close only upon de Bourbon and Clarence Willoughby, the Baroness roused from this family consternation, meeting the noble address of her courtly visitor with something of dignity.

Adhemar de Bourbon's eyes, once turned upon Lolótte, were fixed there by the most dangerous as most potent of spells; the appearance of strong emotion in her he gazed on. Her face raised smilingly at the sound of some one entering, had dropped instantaneously, suffused with deepening blushes; she had,

as instantly, become silent. Yet neither apprehension, nor a wish to get away, were apparent in the trembling stillness of her figure.

"My poor daughter! my unfortunate Lolótte!" exclaimed the Baron, in a tone of sentiment, "I perceive that Monseigneur does us the honour to regard her with compassion."

"With respect, as well as compassion," replied the Chevalier, in a sighing whisper, and drawing near Lolótte: Aigline's hand was at that moment in Clarence's, and the soft pressure it returned to his, told her approval of his friend. The Baron smiled, and felicitated himself upon the lucky chance which had defeated his other expectations, and thus presented his beautiful daughter a second time to the eyes of this supposed connoisseur in beauty. Whatever made a stronger interest for him, in the mind of one who had so much in his power, either to give or obtain, was an object of

importance to La Marot; and too little in the habit of foreseeing probable consequences if unfortunate or disgraceful, when brilliant ones were possible, this presumptuous father, for an instant or two, fancied back the days of enchantment; beheld Lolótte miraculously endowed with talents equal to her beauty, and glittering in the coronet of Limoges!

As he stood simpering and haranguing, Madame la Baronne saw that the game was now in his hands, and her cards useless: disguising, therefore, her just vexation, and consoled by the absence of the Chevalier's suite, she met the cordial greeting of Clarence Willoughby, with suitable enquiries after his father and his own health; leaving, in despair, Lolótte's conduct to its fate.

Agitated by her kindling beauty, touched by her evident emotion, and disordered by a preposterous fancy of still finding her less unfortunate in faculties

than she was said to be, Adhemar de Bourbon seated himself by the side of Lolótte, asking a few questions about her childish employment, which she replied to in bashful monosyllables.

Aware of her daughter's striking exterior, the Baroness was not blind to this obvious admiration of the Chevalier; but she observed so much respect and restraint in his manner, that as no fear of losing her daughter's fortune with herself could be excited by his warmest admiration, she ceased to interfere with her husband's projected plan upon the Chevalier's interest in her situation.

With most offensive hardness, even while lavishing every pathetic epithet upon himself as the most wretched of parents, La Marot volubly detailed to the Chevalier the circumstances of Lolótte's contested fortune; the steps he had taken in consequence; the obstacles he had to surmount in the road to justice; and ending his harangue by the

humblest, and, as he thought, the most masterly insinuations of the use the Vicomte de Limoges' influence might be to them, if timely exerted, before the meeting of the states of Languedoc.

De Bourbon's delicacy was shocked at so merciless a discussion of Lolótte's calamity, by her own side; especially, as he more than once saw her beautiful eyes raised from the ground to her father's face, and fix there, with a wildly-earnest expression, as if some glimmering of light in her mind made her anxious for more; but as they fell again under their long silken lashes, sweetness and bloom diffusing afresh over her face, giving to that face the serenity and loveliness of an angel, he forgot every other emotion in delighted admiration.

The Baron having left the room in search of some *pompous nothing*, to exhibit to his illustrious visitant, Lolótte asked the Chevalier, in a soft, fluttered whisper, whether he were very angry

with her the day before, for wishing to have kept that shining collar? yet declaring, that she had not meant to have kept it. Then receiving his answer, from the penetrating tenderness of his look, sighed, and taking a bunch of flowers from her bosom, put them into his hand. It was the artless offering of innocence, by way of atonement for a fault. The most finished coquetry could not have imagined any thing more seducing: and as Adhemar de Bourbon received these flowers, his emotion was so embarrassing to himself, that to hide it, he called Cecile to him, and seating her on his knee, began caressing her with an earnestness foreign to his usual manner.

Picqued by his foregone notice of her sister, and flattered by his present attention, the vain little girl repaid him, by whispering in his ear all the nonsensical things, as she considered them, which Lolótte had said of his eyes and his manner, the day before: but, to the Che-

valier, there "was method in Lolótte's madness;" at least, there was something more touching to one of his character, in this feeble glimmering of intellect, caused, perhaps, by the kindling flame of the heart, than all the demonstrations of perfectly-rational preference. As Cecile went on, repeating how Lolótte had cried, when told by her mother, that she should never see those *eyes like Aigline's* again, it was not in man to hear such a thing unmoved; it was not possible for those admired eyes to remain fixed on the laughing little whisperer, when their innocent admirer was at his side.

The Chevalier glanced for a moment at Lolótte, whose quivering features were now expressive of feelings, which, alas! she understood not herself: he could not mistake their meaning: and more disordered than ever, more touched, more impressed with the tempting conviction of the impression he had himself made, he disengaged himself from the clinging

playfulness of her bold little sister, and rose to cross the room, and meet the entering Baron.

But Cecile grown still bolder, suddenly snatched Lolótte's flowers out of his breast, where he had mechanically put them, and was making off with her prize, when Lolótte, unable longer to constrain herself, started up in a flame of anger; caught the flowers in her turn, from the object of her instinctive jealousy, then, as if conscious of her own violence, or dreading that of her mother, flung herself upon a seat, in a passion of tears.

Madame de Roche Blanc's irritable nerves, thus suddenly assaulted, vibrated with wrath; and forgetting in whose presence she was, she darted so sharp a rebuke on her poor daughter, whose sensibility understood looks, when her intellects were shut to the sense of words, that the latter would have flown to Aigline for protection, had not the Chevalier almost unconsciously thrown one

arm around her, while with the other he waved back the astonished Baroness. At that moment, Aigline recognised his likeness to the contradictory portrait Clarence had formerly painted of his friend; the cold distancing of his looks and expression to her mother, and the immediate exquisite tenderness of the same countenance when turned towards Lolótte. What his murmured soothings were to the latter, she heard not, they were spoken in so low a tone; but their effect was visible in the gradual abatement of Lolótte's wild sobbings, and the softer heaving of her form, as she continued resting against his shoulder.

Madame de Roche Blanc endeavoured to apologize both for herself and her afflicted daughter; seizing that opportunity of detailing the accidental fright which had in infancy destroyed the faculties of Lolótte, without which explanation, the Chevalier might have apprehended, (perhaps not erroneously, if he thought

of the Baron,) that imbecility was part of the family inheritance. Aigline, meanwhile, motioning back her officious stepfather, drew near her sister. On her approach, the Chevalier, by the gentlest movement, transferred Lolótte to her arms. He would then have moved away, obedient to the supplication of Clarence Willoughby's eyes; but Lolótte, raising her heavenly face all bathed in tears, and bright with innocent hope, besought him not to go, but to stay always, always beside her.

"I cannot, if I would, Lady!" was the Chevalier's half-suffocated reply, as he removed from her with a look, which to Clarence's rapid feelings seemed to say he was actually tearing his heart up by the roots in quitting her. That any man so circumstanced could have such mastery of himself, was to Clarence a subject of amazement and admiration: yet he did injustice to himself in thinking, that because such an effort

would have been far more difficult to him, it would have been impossible. De Bourbon, meanwhile, hardly knowing what he was about, passed under the flowery colonnade opening into the garden, whither the Baron obsequiously followed him. At the sound of the latter's step, the Chevalier hastily passed his hand over his eyes; and bending his head to conceal the feelings which honoured him, prepared to hear much to weary, and yet more to disgust him.

The attention which he there gave to this selfish father's motley petitions for himself and his family, was wholly bestowed through consideration for Lolótte. Though determined to behold her no more, de Bourbon felt that he should long retain that tender remembrance of her artless admiration, which would make it pleasing for him to serve her relations: he, therefore, promised to solicit the office of page to the young Prince of

Bearn, for the Baron's only boy. But in the business of the legacy, he refused all interference; remarking, with austere dignity, upon the sacredness of justice: remarks, which Baron de Roche Blanc was as incapable of appreciating, as his poor daughter was of solving a problem in Euclid.

Clarence, meanwhile, was a pained and silent spectator of Aigline's affectionate arts to allure her weeping sister from the parlour. She succeeded at last; how, he scarcely knew: for all that Aigline said, was said in soft whispers, accompanied with caresses; and with these she gradually beguiled the poor girl out of her mother's presence.

On their departure, Madame de Roche Blanc, with the privilege of old acquaintance, severely reprehended Clarence for this untimely visit of the Chevalier's. His temper and ingenuousness could not fail to pacify her; for he made no hesitation of avowing the delicate motive of

his friend; and his further purpose of quitting L'étoile, solely from the wish of removing their less-considerate companions from the vicinity of the chateau. In the midst of their dialogue, de Bourbon entered with the Baron, whose renewed lamentations at the disappointment of himself and his household were louder than reverential. Adhemar de Bourbon was no longer in the mood to manage either others or himself; and coldly answering these elegies, he took leave of the chateau and its inhabitants, with grave thoughtfulness.

For some time he walked by the side of Clarence in total silence; at length, he said hesitatingly, "Willoughby, how would you have acted in my situation?"

"I know not;" was his friend's frank answer. "I hope as you have done,—but I fear not."

Adhemar's dark eyes lightened his

reply; then after another silence he said, "It is in vain to disguise how powerfully this unfortunate young creature has seized upon — my heart, shall I say? — Yes — it is more than my senses. — Her beauty alone I should have recovered from, as quickly as from the momentary dazzling of a meteor: but that appearance of sensibility, so extraordinary in one so circumstanced, — so much more penetrating therefore — more flattering." — The Chevalier stopt, in confusion; for even from Clarence he would willingly have veiled for ever the infirmity of his character.

Clarence, estimating his friend's sensibility higher than he did himself, and in this instance justly doing it, after a moment's hesitation, laid his hand on his arm, and said with one of those face-glows, so true to his warm heart, "What would I not give, dear Adhemar, that you honoured your own character as I honour it!"

"How mean you?" asked the Chevalier, startled by the expression.

"I mean, that you appear ever suspicious of yourself—doubting your noblest impulses—undervaluing your greatest sacrifices,—and so defraud me of my full joy in being permitted to see all the brightness of the character I love so dearly. If I were not a good guesser at a noble heart, confess now, should I not be half in the dark concerning yours?"

"There may be good policy in such reserve, however;" returned his friend, embarrassed, yet gratified.—"I leave so much to imagination."

"There is no imagination here," observed Clarence; "every tender feeling has been interested unexpectedly by a most beautiful creature—every excuse has been afforded you to stay in her society;—yet you tear yourself away.—De Bourbon, you would admire this self-

command in another, do justice to it, then, in yourself! — at least, be not ashamed that you have human feelings to — conquer!" — The Chevalier was too much gratified to answer, and Clarence resumed.

"The only reproach I can ever make you with justice, is reserve: — yet, do I not wrong your kind professions, by imagining this reserve arises from doubting your friend — I see that it is yourself you injure so."

"You see deeply, Willoughby," returned the Chevalier, crimsoning as he spoke, at this avowal made for the first time by his friend. — "With my infirmity of constitution, I ought to fear such penetration — perhaps I do. — Yet I betray myself to you."

"Betray yourself!" vehemently exclaimed Clarence, turning away with reproach and astonishment in his looks.

"You must bear with my fashion of speaking, as I do with yours," resumed

de Bourbon, in somewhat a colder tone, though inwardly displeased with himself for the unfriendly phrase he had employed. — "Our bond of hearts I hope, depends not upon the sound of our words! — It is a whimsical chance, that you whose nature is wilfully frank, even to bluntness, — and I, who shrink from looking at my own thoughts and motives too narrowly, should be thus knit together."

"Yes; I know not how you abide me at times," returned the ingenuous Clarence, his eyes melting with generous pardon. — "But I can never feel worse towards you, than sorry that you know your own worth so imperfectly. — Now, if I had acted as you have just done, and still intend to do, I should think myself as great a hero as Scipio. — Aye, and call myself so, into the bargain."

"Well, then, I will own there is some heroism in purposing to quit L'étoile,

as I firmly intend to do to-morrow," returned de Bourbon, an expressive smile illuminating his countenance; "yet is it not unworthy, to feel any effort necessary, when I have seen this fair creature but twice, — and convinced myself, that she ——" his lips refused to finish the sentence.

"You have convinced yourself that she has a heart upon which you have made the first, perhaps, the last strong impression it can ever receive," replied Clarence. "It is not her beauty, therefore, which it costs you so much to remove from; it is the thought of leaving one already so unfortunate, to a new species of affliction. There would be *my* point of trial, dear Adhemar. I confess I am a coward at giving pain, even when my reason, as in this sad case, says it is unavoidable."

This expression of Clarence's benevolent feeling, caused an emotion in his friend, which he had not intended to

produce: de Bourbon felt conscious that his regrets had been more occupied with his own share in the pang Lolótte felt in common with him, than by the after-fate of Lolótte herself. He was gloomily blaming the destiny which had thus awakened him to powerful admiration of a creature unfitted adequately to return it, and yet more interesting, from that very disqualification, to his thirst for attachment stripped of worldly motives: —he was resolving to see her no more, lest his future peace should indeed be injured; when Clarence, so circumstanced, would have been absorbed in pitying debate with himself, whether it were or were not demanded of him to yield her the innocent gratification of seeing the aspect she evidently saw with such pleasure, even though his own task of self-command might have been rendered more difficult by such a concession.

But Clarence's heart was not cast in the ordinary mould of man's; who, if

he escape from the limed twig himself, recks not that he leaves tenderer woman's struggling there till death.

"Let us talk of her no more!" de Bourbon said, abruptly; "were she the angel in mind that she is in form, she could be nothing to me—some things are impossible."

"It is well, then, that she is not all charming." Clarence was about to add more in the same strain, but he checked himself, ashamed of the headlong feeling he might too precipitately have advocated. "No—I am wrong," he said, finishing his soberer thought aloud. "We all owe something to station, and family expectations, or rights, so we administer the bitter draught fate obliges us to give, as tenderly as possible.—Baron de Roche Blanc's daughter, in any situation, could be nothing to Adhemar de Bourbon." He then proceeded to enquire whether his friend meant to go from L'étoile; expressing inexpressible chagrin at this

unlucky necessity for his departure. De Bourbon said he could make business at his Viscomty, to form a pretext for his going there. It was, therefore, settled, that the whole party invited by Clarence, should remove thither, where the latter might rejoin them, or do so at Paris, in time for the approaching festivities. "If you and I might have hermitized together in this fair solitude," continued de Bourbon, "as I had secretly resolved, after giving the rest of our company *congé*, how infinitely should I have preferred it to the voluptuous refinements of my uncle Anthony's court! — But it must not be, Willoughby; so to Limoges I go, without you, if you like better to remain."

"I should like to remain — I confess," Clarence spoke with a hesitation unusual to him; then adding more freely, "for at L'étoile, I seem to be with my father again: and my old neighbours will be disappointed if I go away without show-

ing myself to them. Who, my dear de Bourbon, would give pain, and cause mortification to people that sincerely love them, however humble or charmless those persons may be, when five minutes expended in a hearty God bless you — or grateful shake of the hand, would gratify them, and preserve yourself from the merited suspicion of instability or insolence?" De Bourbon thought this consideration too natural to blame it; and promising to disembarras Clarence from the awkwardness of dismissing his own guests, since their departure was indispensable, they shortly reached the house.

The Chevalier at once prevented murmuring, by the tone he assumed. He avowed his visit to Roche Blanc, and his purpose of quitting L'étoile the next day; adding, that his friend Willoughby had in consequence, waived his right to detain any of the party where they were.

When he chose to be master, Adhemar

de Bourbon was so completely: and although none of the party, except Beaurevoir, were actually under his authority, they were so accustomed to obey the nephew of their princes, that each bowed with respect to his present stately command that no attempt should be made to violate the respect he had himself observed towards the unfortunate daughter of Baron de Roche Blanc. To consider M'amselle la Marot as an object of curiosity, or light gallantry, would be unworthy men and gentlemen: he therefore, had resolved upon thus shortening his visit at L'étoile, because the residence of so many strangers there, must be an obstacle to that unhappy young lady's habitual enjoyment of its privacy and pleasantness. Willoughby, of course, he added, as the friend of her family, might remain upon his own paternal estate without indelicacy—indeed, the present party knew, that business had been his principal call thither.

De Bourbon waited not for any promise of conformity with his wishes: that he had expressed his will, was sufficient; and although most of the party revenged themselves for their double disappointment, by roundly rating Clarence, for so easily consenting to relinquish his claim on them, he was satisfied to find, that not one of them had the temerity to meditate any surprize at Chateau Roche Blanc.

Some, then, in no very good humour, and one in no very good spirits, betook themselves to the sports and sight-seeing, destined for general amusement; after which, the day closed very differently from its joyous predecessor.

On the following morning, Adhemar de Bourbon assembled his company, and quitted L'étoile. Grieved as he was to lose this valued associate, Clarence was no sooner alone, than he did indeed feel, as if he were to find his father in these haunts of his boyhood.

He went through the old house, and ran over every well-known walk, with mixed emotions of regret and pleasure: everywhere, one dear and respected idea accompanied him; that of his indulgent father, now far distant, encountering for him, mortifications, disappointments, and delays.

With the few remaining servants too, Clarence could now converse freely and at leisure. He had them all in, alternately, to his solitary meals, (where Godefroi with his martial legends was a privileged guest, like the minstrels of old,) asking them about a thousand trifles, of moment to the affectionate heart, though ridiculous to others.

The interest he thus took in every thing belonging to his home, the kindly, perhaps hasty approbation he expressed of all that had been done or preserved since Mr. Willoughby's departure, was gratifying to these good people, who scarcely knew how to regret the mere comet-like

visit of the Vicomte de Limoges, since his awful presence must have debarred them of the present enjoyment. Clarence reconciled himself to the necessity of this brief visit, by reflecting how impossible it would have been for him to have united the two enjoyments, that of Adhemar's continued society, and the pleasure of renewing between himself and Aigline, the early sympathy of former years.

Something wearied with its high-flavoured pleasures, and half-disenchanted of those vivid expectations with which he had entered the world of Paris, he longed to repose himself upon securer characters, and taste with them the simpler, fresher gratification of unshackled retirement.

In this hope, he soon visited Chateau Roche Blanc again; determined to conciliate the favour of its ungracious mistress, if possible, and endure the frivolity of its master, for the sake of being per-

mitted to converse freely with the only heart there, which his own found ever ready to flow into every channel interesting or agreeable to him.

He was not disappointed: Madame de Roche Blanc, when made acquainted with his probable destiny in England, and with his brilliant fashion of living at the Hotel de Condé, had too much worldly sagacity, to doubt that every *romantic idea* must be driven thence by such powerful stimulants to wider ambition. His favour too, became of consequence to conciliate: for though he would most likely soon become the denizen of a different country, his influence might remain, and her family be by that means rescued from the probable effects of her husband's incurable profusion. She now saw, or fancied she saw, ruin approaching with giant strides: for, depending upon the future possession of Lolótte's contested fortune, the Baron was mortgaging his own remaining pro-

perty, and squandering the sum bequeathed to himself, in the most ridiculous extravagance.

In consequence of Lolótte's humiliating state, and his wife's humour, he could not crowd his own chateau with profusion and company, to the extent he wished; aiming, as he did, at the enthusiastic report of travellers: but he recompensed himself when at Tholouse for restraint in Bearn; so that whether any part of his money went in vicious indulgences, or simply in foolish ones, was doubtful; it was only certain that he would soon be pennyless.

Madame de Roche Blanc, therefore, became as anxious as himself for success in the affair of their boy's appointment to some office fit for his childish age, in the court of Navarre; and she secretly indulged a hope that if such good fortune awaited them, a door might thus be opened to the more brilliant destiny of Cecil, of that spoilt and froward child,

whom she believed destined to grow up a perfect angel in disposition and in person.

With these selfish views, she now gave Clarence Willoughby a most gracious reception, when he came to Roche Blanc; privately discoursing with him upon her family grievances and maternal cares. Clarence could have dispensed with this mark of her favor; not being precisely qualified for an adviser upon such occasions: but he heard her with patience for Aigline's sake, and promised what he really meant to bestow, his interest with the Bourbon princes for her children's advantage.

Occupied at L'etoile by the accumulated business of the estate, and when he came to Roche Blanc, honoured by Madame's especial conversation, he saw less of Aigline than he either wished or had hoped; and, perhaps, that difficulty irritated his impassioned nature into the discovery of a new sentiment for her. But

he did see her; and met her speaking eye-beam so perpetually, that he often came away, believing they had conversed together, when after the first cordial greeting, they had not exchanged more than a sentence.

Lolótte, meanwhile, always in dread of her mother, now seemed more and more dispirited: though she never asked for his friend, it was obvious she never saw Clarence enter without expecting the former to follow; for after the first vivid blush, and averted look of bashful, anxious hope, she would sigh heavily, become pale, and frequently burst into tears. Aigline was secretly apprehensive that an impression, however strange it might be, had been made upon her poor sister's fancy by the Vicomte de Limoges. Thomasine's more experienced observation had held the lamp to hers; and she was so afraid of her mother's remarks taking the same direction, less kindly taking it, that she per force absented her-

self with her sister, from the society of Clarence.

Yet did she feel that no apology was necessary for this, to one, who had but to look in her face, and read there all the affection of a sister: and he, deeply penetrated with pity for Lolótte, and admiration of the charming creature that willingly abandoned her dearest delights for the sad duty of hopeless attendance upon another, found her idea soon become as dangerous as her presence.

The Baron had lost no time in following his new star of promise, the Vicomte de Limoges: he was already gone upon the double business of his law-suit, and the presentation of the little François; completely disregarding the person to whom all this good fortune would be due, if he were indeed successful for his son at last. But such was ever his shallow calculation, and might be one rea-

son why he never had more than the friend of the instant, at his disposal.

The days were now fast departing, which must bring Clarence's visit to his home to a conclusion. About the ceremony of the great marriages in prospect, when he left Paris, he cared not; but for the tournament, and his own share in it, he panted with all that ardour, which, to his boyish imagination would have made such an object the subject of every daily and nightly dream.

The lists were to be opened on the twentieth day of July, and he had been nominated one of the knights in the band which the Prince de Condé was to lead: he was, therefore, resolved not to prolong his stay at L'étoile beyond the time which these circumstances fixed for him: although he felt so thoroughly cheated out of the pleasure he had anticipated in repeating to Aigline alone, all his observations and feelings during the last six months, that there were moments

when he almost wished the chivalric exhibition might he deferred.

By the must lucky, or unlucky of accidents, a delay on his own part occurred. Cecile, who seemed born only to torment every one, except her doting mother, had one evening set her heart upon going to drink cream and eat curds, at a dairy-house down the rapid Gave, which washed the rich pastures of Roche Blanc. She insisted upon going there in a boat; and Clarence Willoughby was, consequently, appointed one of her rowers.

On their return, heated with previous exercise and excited spirits, and persisting in a variety of dangerous experiments of what she could, or could not do with safety in the boat, she suddenly lost her balance and fell into the water. Clarence was overboard the next moment. Expert as a swimmer, it cost him neither alarm nor danger to save the child, but afraid of upsetting the

boat by any attempt to regain it, he made for the shore.

At that part, the banks were peculiarly steep and difficult; and though he succeeded in throwing Cecile upon the one he tried to gain, his own hold failed, and the bough of a tree breaking in his grasp, flung him, not exactly into the river, but among some masses of fractured rocks and roots, where one wrist doubling under him, was instantly sprained or dislocated.

The accident was rather vexatious than afflicting, and though the momentary pain was acute, it did not prevent him from ultimately gaining the footing he attempted; so that by the time the shrieking Madame de Roche Blanc and her trembling daughters were rowed up to the bank, he was able to assist them out of the boat, and to assure them, in a cheerful voice, that Cecile was not hurt.

Aigline, however, immediately saw a

fearful change in the little girl's complexion: before over-heated and flushed, the latter was pale and shivering, while their mother, lost in an hysterical passion, half joy, half anger, seemed unconscious that the greatest proof of kindness she could evince would be to get the dripping child home, as soon as possible.

The distance from Roche Blanc was comparatively nothing; and Clarence, at a word from Aigline, caught Cecile up in one arm, and ran with her to the chateau. By the time Madame de Roche Blanc reached it, Cecile was undressed by Thomasine, and put to bed after swallowing a quieting sudorific. Clarence had then disappeared, anxious that his vexatious accident might not add to the family confusion; and it was not, therefore, until he re-appeared the next day with his arm in a scarf, that even Aigline suspected any mischief had occurred to him: for his own part, he made so light of the thing, that after the first alarm, she,

also, was inclined to disregard it, as he desired; but suddenly recollecting the tournament, she made an exclamation of regret.

A tide of blood rushed to Clarence's face at this exclamation, while he said ingenuously, "I confess it will vex me if I cannot use my hand by that time; however, no matter, I shall only have the more of you all here."

"Dear, kind Clarence!" exclaimed Aigline, with her whole heart in her eyes and her voice: even her watchful mother might have heard that exclamation, and seen that look, without attributing to them any sentiment except that of a fond admiring sister's. Madame de Roche Blanc, indeed, entered immediately afterwards. She was then, as grateful as she could ever be, and as sorry as she could ever be, for the mischance to an indifferent person. Her mind was occupied almost exclusively by Cecile, who was still in bed, but so oppressed with the intense heat

of the weather, and the south aspect of the unshaded chateau, and so feverish from the fright and wetting of the previous evening, that her mother apprehended a serious illness would be produced by these causes united.

Clarence immediately suggested their removal to L'étoile, where the lofty site, the pure air, the profound quiet, the large apartments, and the readiness of his unemployed servants, might ward off this dreaded evil. Whether he went or staid, he urged, L'étoile would be equally at Madame's command; and she had so often been in the habit of taking her youngest daughter there, for a week or more, during the hottest part of summer, while Mr. Willoughby was resident in it, that nothing could be more natural than her doing so now.

Clarence proposed this so earnestly and so openly, and Madame was so well aware of the many comforts and conveniences to be found at L'étoile, which

she had neither means nor energy to furnish for herself, that alive solely to Cecile's health and amusement, she forebore to ask herself what might be the opinion of others, or the consequence to her other daughter's peace, in thus establishing them under the same roof with one amiable enough to win an artless heart, but one not likely to lower his own high views, for the sake of any portionless girl.

After some hesitation on Madame de Roche Blanc's part, it was agreed that Cecile herself was to be the umpire; and if she continued to suffer from the heat at Roche Blanc, which was in truth stifling, and *fancied* a removal to the mountain air, the whole party should emigrate thither till the sultry season was past. Clarence still talked of Paris, and the military pageant, and his own departure; and Madame de Roche Blanc, prepared for her husband's stay at Tholouse, till their *great cause* should be

near a conclusion, was contented, therefore, to imagine the probability of her commanding at L'étoile, for the next two or three weeks.

Cecile's decision was exactly what Clarence wished. To a spoiled child, every change of place holds out the expectation of new gratifications. Besides, she was now seriously ill of an intermittent, which making her more fantastic and humoursome than usual, rendered every thing desirable which could amuse her. The more important object of abating her disorder, was also to be attained by this removal; and if the child herself, only thought of the pampering she anticipated at Mr. Willoughby's, Aigline dwelt on the real service such a residence might prove both to her and to their mother.

To L'étoile, therefore, Madame de Roche Blanc removed, where she was installed in the very best apartments, and made so entirely mistress, that Clarence considerately assured her he should

never approach them without an express invitation. In the forenoons, he betook himself to business, to exercise, or study; and of evenings he joined the small circle in his father's noble saloon, where sometimes he conversed, sometimes he read, while Aigline courted the dejected Lolótte to share her lighter needle works; and Madame de Roche Blanc affected to listen, though she was in reality moodily occupied with vain remorse about Aigline's wasted fortune, and apprehensions for the future destiny of her darling.

Clarence was soon obliged to relinquish every hope of appearing at the tournament. His accident, though slight in itself, was precisely of a nature to incapacitate him from managing a horse, or using a shield. It was not skilfully treated by an obscure mountain practitioner, who came from a distance at distant intervals to visit Cecile; he was therefore warned betimes to make up his mind to disappointment. To Clarence, it was a dis-

appointment. To see a tournament with more than the eyes of his imagination, had been an object of passionate longing to him, from his earliest years: the books of chivalry he read, inflamed this passion; and it was increased by his after-companionship with one, who seemed to realize the picture of a knight of old. What had been his transport then, when he had a prospect of beholding, in the promised spectacle, the last splendors of chivalry, ere that extraordinary institution disappeared for ever from the horizon of polished life!

To share in any military shew, without distinguishing himself, was an intolerable idea; to go there only as a spectator, was equally insupportable: he, therefore, wrote at once to the Prince de Condé, stating his situation, and relinquishing, almost with a pang like that of parting from what we love best, his destined rank in his train.

This letter dispatched by the servant

who had accompanied Clarence through his campaigns, found the Prince still at Nerac. Adhemar de Bourbon and his party were at Limoges, on their way to Paris. Lancélot brought back, not only the prince's gracious expression of regret and condolence, but the most distracting description of all he had himself seen on the road and at Gascony, concerning the tournament. For Lancélot had no mercy on his master's feelings, seeing he shared in the privation; and had no sympathy with his fastidious disdain of it as a mere spectator. Clarence had previously familiarized himself with the whole ceremonial of the magnificent shew; he had seen all the preparations; he had talked of nothing else for the last month at Paris: with courtiers, soldiers, ladies, armourers, squires, still the theme was the tournament, for the hero of it was to be the king. Clarence had done all this, so that his desire seemed incapable of addition; yet now, when

Lancélot, in his uncouth phraseology, described the eager crowds that were hurrying from every quarter, nay, from other countries, to witness this noble exhibition, where not only princes, but kings were to be performers, his mortification became extreme, and it cost him one of the strongest efforts he had ever made, to conceal from Madame de Roche Blanc the impatience with which he considered the little spoiled girl who caused his disappointment.

Not merely old Godefroi, but Aigline would have persuaded him to accompany his illustrious friend to Paris, and at least be on the spot, in case a suspension of the pageant, should allow time for the restoration of his hand to its ordinary capacities. At first, he listened to her, irresolute whether to follow her advice, or not; but soon, he lost all wish to be anywhere, where Aigline was not also. Unconscious of

his real motive, he believed that to complete some rural improvements, begun by his father at L'étoile, was the source of his unwillingness to leave it for a mere contingency; and he staid therefore.

CHAP. V.

The fever of Cecile, though greatly abated by the mountain air, still lingered on her hectic cheek, rendering her by times languid, or irritable; and Madame de Roche Blanc herself, by one or two fainting fits after exertion, proved that she too required a bracing climate. Absorbed in herself and her favourite, this narrow-hearted mother willingly left Lolótte to the charge of Aigline, and Aigline to her own discretion.

During the sweet season of summer, the sisters habitually lived in the open air. At L'étoile, there were wildernesses of roses, which growing under the shade of its high Accacias, were kept in their utmost fragrance for a much longer period than in the open garden at Roche

Blanc; among these, her favourite flowers, Aigline generally sat working, or superintending her sister's slow progress in the humble sorts of study adapted to her intellect. In the gardens, therefore, Clarence soon learned to find them, and to loiter with them on his way to remoter objects. At such periods, the affectionate intimacy of their childish years was renewed; and talking to Aigline as to a dear and indulgent sister, he related, almost unconsciously, and by degrees, every circumstance of the life he had led, when away from his home.

Such overflowings of the heart are not to be deemed egotism: though so to brand them, is an expedient often resorted to, by those who would spare themselves the expence of sympathy, or who are coldly indifferent to all but the surface of human character.

There was scarcely an event or feeling, of any consequence or novelty, that Clarence did not repeat: yet was there

nothing in this disclosure which the purest ear need have shrunk from listening to.

If Aigline were amazed, confounded by the very different views of the world which his description gave, from what he and she had entertained when they painted that world with their own visionary pencils, how much more was she startled by his ingenuous confession of the strong attraction he had felt towards society which his cooler judgment condemned! She had never seen the graces which captivate, and the talents which mislead, united to a depraved heart: she was, therefore, ignorant of the deceptive power which our inclination has over our reason, when the one is played off against the other by a skilful hand, and the odious names of prejudice, want of candour, &c. are used to shame us out of our best principles. She was equally slow of understanding the tyranny of popular opinion; and the scythe, or rather

scourge, with which Ridicule gradually daunts the strongest spirits, when once they have entered the circle of its influence.

Clarence avowed his moments of rivalry, and mortification, and gratified vanity, with all the artlessness of youth; laughing over the mistakes of his own heart, when he fancied himself for an hour or an evening in love; but silent on the more subtle dangers which had assailed him from women whose high rank and marriage-bonds, rendered their designs upon the honour and peace of youth, wholly unsuspected by their intended victim.

"You can have no conception, my dear Aigline," he said to her one day, as they happened to encounter each other alone, "how much we have to unlearn when we teach ourselves. I was amazed to find out in Paris that I had a million of faults, which not one of you here in Bearn, had ever taken the trouble to

look for, and mend; or, perhaps, you were all too good, to be of much use to such a self-willed, wrong-headed, volatile fool as I was — perchance am still. Yes, I mean what I say! I do protest that I grew ashamed of half a score of my own selfish habits, only by seeing how ugly they looked in others: — as children leave off crying and making wry faces, when they are taken to a glass and shown themselves —"

"But what selfish habits had you, Clarence?" asked Aigline, remembering with a thrill of affectionate pleasure the days of their mutual forbearance.

"One enormous one," he answered, "the trick of going straight forward to whatever I wished, or purposed, without consideration of consequences or persons — the habit, in short, of continued self-indulgence. At L'étoile I had no temptation to wish for any improper gratification, so whatever I desired, I was permitted to have or to do; and

that made it no small difficulty for me to resist other inclinations when they were powerfully solicited, and less blameless."

"So then, you think contradiction wholesome discipline?" asked Aigline, rather archly.

"Indeed I do, now," was Clarence's answer, "when judiciously administered. I speak by experience, who have had all my own headstrong passions to break in, by main force, when a little gentle curbing from the commencement, would have made the task easy, and the conquest sure. Yet, do not think I blame my dear, dear father! I love him the better for his indulgent affection; though I have lamented it at times. It was so difficult to deny myself, when he had never denied me any thing!"

"And why was it necessary to deny yourself, dear Clarence?"

"Why?" he repeated, stopping and looking at her with a mixture of tender-

ness and gaiety: "because perhaps the gratification I myself coveted, or was induced to seek solely to do like others, however harmless in itself, might have led to something less irreproachable; or have engaged me in intimacies discreditable to my soberer taste, or repugnant to those I lived with, and loved better. In short, in the world at large, there are multitudes of things to wish and want, which do not exist in happy retirement; petty competitions, which when we are a little removed from them, we are ashamed to have cared about — and contemptible vanities, which we despise ourselves for having been duped by. How often have I not been ready to go to buffets with myself, for having been picqued by some coxcomb's impertinence into the attempt at winning attention from him where he most sought it, or for having been elated by the apparent favour of some new beauty, for whom, in reality, I did not care a daw's feather! But I think,

Aigline, that neither from these, nor more serious temptation, I shall ever be in danger again. I feel as if the air of home, had refreshed my better feelings. No; I shall never, again, care for the smile that plays only on my vanity or fancy."

"Some smile will go deeper, depend upon it, Clarence," said Aigline, quite unconscious of the power of her own at that moment, although she saw the blood mantle over his features.

"It may be so," was his laconic answer; after which, he sunk into silence.

Aigline then naturally reverted to his interesting friend, the Chevalier.

At his name, Clarence kindled again, describing the admirable sobriety with which that young hero walked through the enchanted garden of Catharine de Medicis' court. "While I," he continued, "ran through every path that tempted me, just in the same spirit with

which you and I used to explore new haunts on real ground, when we were children. That perilous passion for adventure, was of no consequence among the Pyrenees, Aigline, where if I stumbled, I could only break my neck; but on these slippery heights a fall might have broken a heart worth a thousand necks like mine. My dear father's, I mean."

Clarence paused at that honoured name, both his eyes and his complexion suffusing; then resuming with encreased animation:—"Every thing seemed beautiful to me, every body charming! de Bourbon often told me that with my wild spirits I amused myself, and so fancied that other people amused me. He was in the right; and I was often desperately ashamed of those acquaintances after awhile, whom I had vaunted at first as super-excellent. In fact, I was mad for perpetual excitement; and I do sincerely believe, should have dissipated

myself into a thoroughly worthless person — and that is nearly as bad as a wicked one — if Heaven had not blessed me with such a friend as Adhemar. His noble example was a silent summons to better things; my admiration of him made me listen to it; and so, by degrees, I left off wasting my whole existence in gazing and laughing: at last I betook myself to sound study, for part of every day. Thus it is, to Adhemar, Aigline, that you are obliged, if your friend Clarence turns out less ignorant and idle than the mass of young mad-caps."

"So then, Clarence," observed Aigline, "you have not found the whole world as you expected, like the brilliant party you met at Escalette?"

"I found plenty of charming, brilliant persons still," he answered gaily; "scores of them. But one gets *behind the scenes* at last, with every description of character; and there are not many that can bear such inspection. It is wonderful

how little one is delighted by the painted complexion of social mirth, when you know, by having seen it unpainted, that there is a jaundiced skin under it; or taken in by the well-arranged drapery which is meant to make a wry shoulder look straight! When I was at Escalette, I was looking from the front of the theatre, as I may say — therefore, all the actors seemed gods. I have discovered since, that one or two of them, were ugly mortals enough."

"Then, has not this discovery made mirth, and fair-seeming, suspicious to you?" enquired Aigline.

"Not painfully so," returned Clarence; "it just abates my intoxication amongst strangers, and makes me ten thousand times happier and gayer with the friends I love — as I love you, Aigline," he added, taking her hand.

Never gave sister to brother, a hand, with warmer, purer affection than Aigline now yielded hers to him. Artlessly ex-

claiming, "That she wished for no wider happiness than to remain at Roche Blanc, and have Mr. Willoughby and his son again fixed at L'étoile." That happiness, however, she dare not hope, nor Clarence promise. He could only talk of L'étoile always remaining their property, so long as he had power to retain it; and, while he imparted his hopes and anxieties relative to that country, where Aigline knew she ought to wish him replanted, he never suffered either her or himself to imagine total alienation possible, from the foreign home endeared by so many associations. There would indeed, she knew, always be a strong bond between him and Bearn, in the person of his friend de Bourbon, whose facilities of meeting him there, must engage him at least, if not Mr. Willoughby, to frequent his residence at Roche Blanc.

In conversations like these, while Madame la Baronne and Cecile were yet sleeping, and Lolótte only enjoyed with

them the sparkling freshness of early morning, Aigline and Clarence spent many a delightful hour. If, in these conversations, there was a less quantity of exuberant gaiety than in their childish years, there was more interest, more variety, more delightfulness. Yet was the buoyancy of youth still apparent in both their characters, though so early taught to think and to feel. Frequently catching the infection of mirth from each other's momentary humour, they would innocently laugh away the time, which they had at first destined for serious discourse. Clarence had too early felicitated himself upon having conquered his habits of inconsideration; for he was now hourly rendering Aigline's society more and more necessary to his future happiness; without staying to enquire what was the reason of the more tender, as well as more vivid pleasure, he felt in society which he used to think he appreciated to its full extent of worth.

In whatever points of view he chose to see his prospects in England, he soon ceased to speak, with any hesitation, about L'étoile's being the permanent home of his father and himself; while Aigline, little versed in the affairs of life, or called upon to reflect on the claim of a man's country, was easily led to think of it as such, whenever he chose to represent it so.

Clarence, indeed, never seemed more heartily inclined to revive all his old affections and pleasures. He made many an excursion into the mountains to visit shed and chateau, see favourite prospects, give benevolences to his father's distant pensioners, and renew the luxury of rest after fatigue. Every one met him with joy, from the simple herdsman to the hardy Pyrenean guide: a joy so grateful to the affectionate heart, that perhaps when seated on some thymy hillock with the shepherds, animating their rustic mirth by his gay good-

humour, and sharing their coarse meal with a mountain appetite, he tasted as much real pleasure as ever he had done in the polished circles of the Louvre.

From these excursions when Aigline saw him return, and heard his sportive account of all he had risked and relished, she found again the heedless and adventurous Clarence of former years. It was in their calmer hours that she became sensible of the alteration, nay improvement in his character; of its great accession of generous sensibilities and liberal acquirements; of all that promises to render the manhood as admirable as the youth is amiable.

If Clarence could always have remained at the age in which they first parted, she would never have wished any addition to his qualities: but as that could not be; as the fruit must succeed the blossom, or else leave the once-blooming branch unsightly as barren, through the long seasons which follow our spring; and as

Aigline, from her acquaintance with the Abbé Fontevraud, now knew what was expected of a man who should disdain to take a secondary place amongst those who aspired to the highest, she was rejoiced to observe that the playmate of her childhood, sought to add the scholar, to the gentleman and the soldier.

Of Fontevraud she had more than once spoken to Clarence; but with the clerical title before his name, joined to the account of his learning and frail health, the idea of such a person's pretending to her affections, never entered Clarence's imagination. He regretted that this intellectual stranger had not found his way to him at Paris; and Aigline, while he said so, thinking the Abbé's interest in him had probably originated solely in a deeper, though transient interest in herself, smiled inwardly at the levity of even a grave man's heart. After speaking of Clarence Willoughby to him one day, he had said, by way of cautioning her

against too much confidence in the early virtues of this dear, adopted brother, that the good qualities of very young men were often but a *mirage*. She thought, now, that the same remark might be applied to the affections of older ones.

But the thought gave her scarcely a moment's concern. It is only from the heartlessness or ingratitude of those we ourselves love, that our hearts receive such a shock as changes the "sweet humour of our blood;" distempering our views of every other character, and spreading over the whole remainder of creation the jaundiced hue of our own feelings.

A fortnight had elapsed since Clarence's return to his home, when Baron Roche Blanc appeared half drunk with joy and self-importance, almost to the exclusion of gratitude, for the honour conferred upon his family through the mediation of the Vicomte de Limoges. Pages were appointed for the chamber of the Prince of Bearn, and François la

Marot was nominated as one of them. The boy had been seen and admired by the queen — *approved*, was too cold a word for such an orator as the Baron to use; and the latter brought his son now merely to kiss his mother's hand with the grace his father had taught him, ere he entered upon the splendid career of courtly service.

Clarence laughed outright at the pomposity of his old neighbour; yet he rejoiced at the success of a presumption he would have scrupled to hazard for one connected with himself, though Aigline was determined to believe its success, the consequence of Adhemar de Bourbon's friendship for him.

Madame de Roche Blanc was thunderstruck at this first lucky hit of her husband's random game through a life of sixty years; and, could she have believed it the forerunner of an equally unexpected felicity in the affair of their law-suit, she might, perhaps, for once,

have called herself happy. Cecile was enchanted with the points and tassels of her brother's gilded dress; and Lolótte, hearing the name of the Vicomte de Limoges repeated again and again by her voluble father, shewed that anxiety to understand what was going forward, which had not shone in her downward eyes, for any other subject, since the disappearance of the Chevalier. François La Marot was rather an engaging boy, and decidedly handsome, like all Madame de Roche Blanc's children; Clarence, therefore, felt no apprehension of disgrace from his friend's recommendation of the boy, except what his father's indelicate avidity rendered probable, and he gave the latter some broad hints of his apprehension.

Baron de Roche Blanc, ever invulnerable to reproof, whether given openly or by insinuation, paid no attention to such admonition; but immediately began reasoning away any sense of obligation, by

proving the right of a La Marot to every species of distinction. To have heard him declaim on the subject of his family's antiquity and desert, a by-stander must have supposed that even Adam was an upstart to them, and the Seven Champions of Christendom thieves, in comparison with their patriotism and prowess. Such an impertinent, was an incurable!

The Baron was in too great haste to place his son under a royal roof, to abide longer than was necessary under his own. He, therefore, posted off again to Nerac, previously making the tour of his immediate neighbourhood, to exhibit his boy, and vaunt his great interest at court.

Monsieur le Page, as his vain-glorious parent styled him at every second word, had just enough of his father's conceit, and his eldest sister's sense, to enjoy this sudden consequence without becoming odious; and he quitted his home, therefore, with as many blessings from his

greater and lesser neighbours, as he gave them smiles and thanks.

Aigline, while pressing the little fellow to her breast, was shocked to hear his father arranging for the continuance of his family at L'étoile, until some alterations were finished in the chateau, which he had just set workmen about; and for which, it had struck him, the present would be a most admirable opportunity. The complete indifference with which this empty-hearted man accepted every species of obligation, neither feeling pride nor gratitude, was always painful to her delicacy; and it was only by recalling how much she herself owed to him for so many years of cheerful support, that she could check such disgust.

Madame de Roche Blanc, too, was sincerely displeased, when she found that whatever occurred, it would be almost impossible for her to return to her own home before some weeks were expired; but Clarence, more overjoyed

than he knew how to account for, so warmly urged the pleasure it gave him to see his father's friends under his father's roof, as though he were still there; and Cecile was in such transports, that Madame de Roche Blanc at length consented to be obliged and gratified.

While Clarence was thus reconciling her to the evil of remaining where she "was ministered unto, like a god," the Baron took Aigline aside, and wasted half an hour's breath in impressing her with an awful sense of Clarence Willoughby's present and future consequence; of the probability there was that he would either be a very great personage in England, or by the most brilliant marriage in France, raise himself to equal distinction. The orator professed to have had the latter secret imparted to him when he went to present his boy to the Vicomte de Limoges, by one of Willoughby's dearest friends, but as it *was* a secret, he merely permitted

himself to hint just so much as enabled Aigline to discover that the expected bride was the widow of the Comte d'Enghien; and the faithful confidant Adhemar de Bourbon himself. She was as much amused by her step-father giving this second-sight of their young neighbour's coming honours, as an excuse for obliging him with companions in his otherwise-wearisome solitude, as entertained with the preposterous confidence itself. Clarence had talked to her of the youthful widow with that respectful interest her rank, sex, and situation required; and had so completely marked the degree of interest he felt in her, and the absurdity of encouraging it further, by frankly relating the transient disturbance of his feelings on being one day led by an indiscreet person to fancy more in her graciousness and his own pretensions than either warranted, that she laughed in her heart at the whole thing. The laughter had mounted to her eyes,

and glittered through their beautiful fringes in spite of her effort to hide it; for upon the Baron's departure, Clarence enquired what had amused her so much in his parting harangue? and, at her instant avowal of it, he laughed also; then, recovering himself with a half sigh —"I think you might have flattered me by a little sentiment on this occasion, however, Aigline. Such total indifference is not very palatable."

"Indifference!" repeated Aigline, energetically, "if it were true, how rejoiced I should have been."

"Rejoiced!" Clarence repeated in his turn, visibly changing colour.

"Would you have had me otherwise?" asked Aigline, earnestly regarding his altered countenance, "I don't understand you, Clarence."

"Perhaps you won't, Aigline." At that moment her mother's voice called her from the hall, and hastening from him, she forgot the momentary bewilder-

ment caused by his manner rather than by his words; and when they encountered again, neither of them renewed the subject.

From the hour in which Madame de Roche Blanc's continuance at L'étoile was settled, and the reason for it rendered visible in the brick and mortar round the chateau, Clarence endeavoured to make her residence with him more varied than he would have tasked himself to do, had her stay been shorter. Like his father, he invited the few neighbours within reach, to diversify their evenings; and promoted the rural fetes of the season, amongst the tenants and servants, with the same kind spirit. He was not sorry of such an excuse for renewing the *plentiful housekeeping at L'étoile*, which, during Mr. Willoughby's residence there, had so often given refreshment to travellers, and pilgrims, and supplied luxuries to many a sick or aged peasant.

More and more thrown with Aigline into the same habits and feelings, he was daily induced to think how superior she was to all he had vividly and transiently admired in Paris. Conversing with her, his soul felt as his body did among the Pyrenees, breathing its native atmosphere; and, while her animated affection surrounded and invigorated all his faculties of enjoyment, he staid not to analyze the nature of the sentiment which made her inestimable, who was once but valuable. Had he done so, he might have been convinced that it was a real, spontaneous sentiment: for here was no admiration from multitudes, to animate his admiration of her beauty and enchantment; no competition with rivals, to stimulate his desire of adding to, and fixing her fond regard for himself; yet did he feel, that one kind glance from Aigline in the lyme-walks of L'étoile, without witnesses, without her own consciousness of what he hoped that glance

discovered like summer lightning opening the Heavens, — was dearer and more delightful to him, than all his triumphs at the Louvre.

The natural vivacity of Aigline, joined to that extreme sensibility which the circumstances of her home had thus early developed; nay, her very ignorance of the world, and her engaging eagerness to learn every thing which could fit her for continued companionship with the friend of her childhood, rendered her society as full of interest as of charm.

To conquer difficulties, was always a joy to Clarence; and, when he met her, pale, sad, and thoughtful, (revolving as she often did, the cruel blight of her sister's faculties,) and left her gay, sparkling, and glowing, he could scarcely fail to imagine that he possessed absolute sway over every throb of her heart, and every nerve of her frame.

But he judged hastily and erroneously; either led astray by his own sanguine

nature, or by the artificial laws of that narrow, though lofty circle, in which he had been moving, where every species of enthusiasm between persons of different sexes was condemned, perchance properly, to silence, unless those persons were united by the bond of consanguinity, or sought that of love in marriage. Aigline's feelings for him were only those of a sister, fondly anxious for his honour and happiness; delighted with whatever could contribute to either, without idea of other participation in them than disinterested sympathy; and so little accustomed to think of any individual enjoyment for herself, except by mere reflection from the hearts she loved, that the cheerlessness of her lot, if parted for ever from Clarence Willoughby by a combination of fortunate ties for him elsewhere, never entered her thoughts.

Days then passed unheeded, enjoying by snatches each others awakening conversation. Aigline's fine apprehension

of all those lighter shades of sentiment and wit, in which Clarence was conscious of excelling, and which even in the refined circles of the capital, were often too delicate to catch attention, atoned for her imperfect acquaintance with science and classic history. What was original in him she could discern at a glance, and taste with the highest relish; and what was acquired, he found a pleasure in teaching her. It is natural to every species of character, to enjoy appreciation; and perhaps Clarence and Aigline liked each other the more, from observing that not one of their individual excellencies escaped mutual notice and approval.

In spite, therefore, of the sincerest and saddest observation of Lolótte's depressed spirits, and the consequent stationary state of her intellect, Aigline every day recovered more and more of her original brightness and buoyancy. In Clarence Willoughby's society she wanted nothing more; or rather she forgot every actual

cause for melancholy foreboding. She looked not beyond the present: she was happy; and she was wise enough not to scrutinize that happiness.

Blissful moments, snatched from the dark gulf of human destiny! Moments, whose bright gleams sometimes remain to enlighten that sad abyss, even after the orb of joy itself has disappeared from our horizon!

Clarence no longer wore his arm in a sling, nor did his hand appear quite incapable of its ordinary functions; but the day of the tournament drew so near, and Paris was so distant, that he yielded to the reasonableness, with a memorable degree of reason, of making no effort to retrieve his disappointment. Aigline no longer felt much desire to urge him; and no one else at L'étoile, except old Godefroi, ventured to press the subject.

The momentous twentieth of July passed, cloudless and brilliant. Under the high trees of his home, listening to

the distant tapping of the woodpecker from the woods, in the deep stillness of noon, he that had hoped to have been a distinguished person in the *melée* of that day, lay stretched in delicious indolence among flowers and grasses; hovered over by glittering insects of every wing, from the gorgeous butterfly to the aërial gauze-fly, mechanically turning over the leaves of a book, which he had opened for serious perusal; but which was soon a blank to him. Alternately, the splendid vision of the tournament with the gallant bearing of his friends, and the softer dream of days long past with Aigline and his father, when the full value of both were unknown to him, or his own appreciation of them had not made itself be felt, passed before his mental eye. He had sighs for both visions; though sighs of a very different character: the last was sweet and tender; the other ardent, impatient, disappointed.

Clarence was too young in love, as in life, not to give up such a scene as the tournament with reluctance; even though by such a sacrifice he retained her society, who was hourly becoming more necessary to his existence. Was it because no rival had yet appeared to alarm him for his treasure? or because he wished to obtain a new claim on her favour by new distinctions? Endless were his speculations upon the result of this warlike show; and of Aigline's wishes that all he wished distinction for, should have distinguished themselves. Paris was too distant for the quick transmission of such intelligence. Yet as Adhemar de Bourbon had promised his friend all the details by whatever courier was dispatched to Nerac, the fulfilment of his promise was watched for by more than one inhabitant of L'étoile, with breathless impatience.

According to ordinary calculation, three days had yet to elapse, ere a

messenger could arrive from Paris and Gascony, when a morning of peculiar beauty and freshness gave force to Clarence's entreaty that Madame de Roche Blanc and her daughters would walk with him over the first range of woods skirting L'étoile, to give their opinion upon certain alterations he thought of making there.

In some places the largest trees were grown so thick, as wholly to shut out both sunshine and prospect, which, admitted, must embellish the home-views; whilst in others, inferior trees had withered, or were struck with lightning, so as to become unsightly objects in a situation where those of nobler growth, thus awfully visited, might have formed picturesque objects for the muse or the pencil.

To cut some down, and lop others, was the task Clarence destined himself to superintend and share. He proposed making a sort of fête of it, by taking

refreshments and eating them under the trees, beside the cool dashing of the torrent. Madame de Roche Blanc had no reasonable objection to offer, and Cecile was ordered to live in the open air, whenever the heat was moderate. The party, therefore, was made; and all the choicest fruits of L'étoile were selected for the occasion.

Followed by the woodman of the estate, and occupied with his fair guests, Clarence gaily roamed from grove to grove, sparing many a doddered oak for old associations' sake, and lopping those with his own hand which his father had oftenest sat under.

Madame de Roche Blanc, soon weary from indifference to inanimate objects and real indisposition, presently established herself in one of the natural grottoes of the demesne, with her work and the basket of refreshments for companions. While Aigline, with a little cruise of wine for the wood-cutters, and

her sisters with baskets for gathering wild fruits and flowers, ran at random through the leafy labyrinths where Clarence, directing the woodman, occasionally stayed them with some kind salutation or amusing remark.

The clear purity of the air impregnated with the aromatic exhalations of resinous trees, and the softer perfumes of flowering ones; the stillness of those extensive woods, where, except birds and squirrels, their happy party seemed the sole inhabitants; the mere rustling of the innumerous leaves above their heads, and the blue glimpses of sky admitted through their openings, each of these things, separately, would have caused the most agreeable sensations in Aigline; but united, and seen and enjoyed with Clarence Willoughby, they became pregnant with actual transport. She was yet young enough to be allowed such innocent, though perhaps extravagant transport.

To her enchanted ear, the sound of his voice calling her from a distance or near at hand, to pronounce upon the fate of a huge bough or a tree itself, caused her thrills of lively pleasure. Never had she attached any importance to her own name before; now, it seemed to her sweet, and expressive of much that was endearing and gracious. As yet she guessed not, that it was his voice alone which was beginning to give it this charm.

As the heavy branches fell under his rapid stroke, and the prospects these branches had veiled appeared like magic pictures, in long vistas or towering pinnacles before her, she thought of Clarence's absent father, remembering the placid yet deep delight he had always taken in his beautiful woods, and fervently wishing that he could be wafted to them at that moment. His respected image softened her rapturous enjoyment into tenderer pleasure: pensive, but not

unpleasing ideas then thronged upon her; and, wearied at length in spirits rather than in frame, she sat down in one of the green glades just cleared of unsightly thorns, and opened to a view of the Spanish Pyrenées, to rest herself with Lolótte, while Clarence ran off with Cecile, now tired and hungry, in search of Madame de Roche Blanc and the provisions.

Lolótte, amused by the novelty and activity of their morning's occupation, and always at her ease with Clarence, had shown signs of returning playfulness not a little comforting to Aigline: she was endeavouring to follow the wild notes of a Spanish-moresco air which her sister had long been teaching her, for Lolótte's voice was singularly sweet and touching, and Aigline was gazing with admiration on the silvery summits of those magnificent mountains in the dominions of the Spanish monarch, which had revived the memory of this song,

when Lolótte all at once stopt, and flung herself with a slight shiver, whether of pain or pleasure her sister guessed not at the instant, upon her bosom.

The nature and cause of this emotion was evident, when, upon looking up, Aigline beheld the Chevalier de Bourbon within a few paces of them. He was paler than when she had first seen him, his dress disordered, his countenance disturbed. Could the beauty of Lolótte have any share in these alterations? or were they merely the effects of rapid travelling? Ere she could answer the question to herself, after a single moment's hesitation he came forward, uttered the usual form of polite salutation, though evidently mechanically, and then asked for Willoughby.

After one wistful glance at Lolótte, his eyes were instantly averted; while, all trembling and dyed in blushes, she began caressing an Italian greyhound that followed him.

In answer to Aigline's respectful questions — for it was she that had to address this descendant of the Bourbons — she found that the Chevalier had only just ascended the mountain, leaving his horses and attendants in the valley; and that having missed his way to the house, he had come where he then was by mere accident.

The anxiety with which he enquired for Clarence, and the disturbance of his manner, made Aigline apprehend that he was the bearer of bad news from England; and, seized with alarm, she did not hesitate to enquire if it were so.

"I know of no evil tidings from Willoughby's father," was his unceremonious reply. Aigline ventured no more; but timidly proposing to go in search of Clarence with her sister, or to conduct the Chevalier first to the house, upon his bowing assent to the last proposal, she led the way, and he slowly followed. As they went along, de Bourbon spoke little,

often smothering sounds, scarcely articulate, for sighs they were not — yet, if his lips were silent, his darkened countenance spoke; and the sparkling fire which at times lightened from that shrouded sky, gave evidence of many a stirring thought within.

Meanwhile, Lolótte never addressed him, except by her eyes, which, melting with tears and apprehensiveness — for it was evident that her mother's displeasure had taken painful hold of her memory — seemed to entreat pity and protection at his hand, for whom she suffered. Such an appeal was irresistible; and Adhemar de Bourbon, by degrees forgetting those profound interests which had till this moment been agitating him solely, — forgetting, also, his resolution to think of Lolótte's fate no more, all at once abandoned himself to the short-lived pleasure of gazing on the variations of the beautiful blood in her cheeks, till every variation seemed throbbing in his own bosom.

Embarrassed as much by his now entranced appearance, as by her sister's obvious emotion, Aigline, with some difficulty, found courage to thank the Chevalier for the distinction conferred upon her young brother, through his gracious interference.

"Baron de Roche Blanc must thank Willoughby," returned de Bourbon, smiling, somewhat disdainfully, at the recollection of the Baron. "He cannot be interested for any one whom I have not gratification in serving."

"What happiness! did he hear this from one so loved, — so honoured, I mean." Aigline's precipitate sensibility had hurried her out of herself in this familiar exclamation, and she stopt abruptly. The Chevalier turned his eyes upon her, as she broke off, with such graciousness of expression, that she was then sensible of all their beauty and power.

Perhaps the Chevalier was as much

struck by the vivid expression of her countenance, hitherto so veiled in his presence; for more complacently regarding her, he said, "With all his rashness and susceptibility, I know no one so true to the engagements both of his honour and affection as Willoughby is. He may deceive himself, some time or other; but, I think, never either friend or enemy, that trusts to him. I would not say this of any other man."

"Yet, how he undervalues himself!" Aigline exclaimed: "he talks of I know not how many faults which, he says, the sunshine of the court brought to light in him."

"'Tis a pernicious shine, indeed, lady," returned de Bourbon, his countenance clouding anew, "engendering the deadly serpent and the vile worm. If it hatched but one of these, in Willoughby's generous nature, he crushed it ere it had life. If he endure to the end!—"

"Be sworn, he will!" interrupted

Aigline, then blushing at her own energy, she looked down in confusion.

"He may be soon tried, lady!" was the Chevalier's answer. There was something in the tone of his voice, which caused Aigline to look up again, and the tempestuous colours of his face at that moment convinced her that no common circumstances had brought him to L'étoile. She hazarded no further remark; and his mind evidently falling back upon one agitating thought, became so absorbed by it, as to abstract him from all notice of Lolótte.

As his eyes fixed upon the ground, Lolótte's were raised oftener, and with less fearfulness than hitherto; but the ideas she might gather from his gloom were too feeble to produce any visible effect upon the innocent admiration with which she regarded his noble air, and interesting physiognomy. The dog continued to fawn upon and sport round her, as she advanced with her sister;

and soon, Lolótte's countenance losing every cloud, shone as dazzlingly with delight as with beauty.

In one of the glades nearer the house they encountered Clarence, returning from conducting Madame de Roche Blanc and the sleepy Cecile thither. At sight of the Chevalier he uttered an exclamation of joy, and springing forward, met him half way.

"De Bourbon! and with ——" he whispered, as they embraced.

"We talk not of her, Willoughby!" the Chevalier answered, with an inward breath. "This is no time for weakness. You and I must converse alone."

Clarence motioned Aigline on, and yielding, all amazed, to the impelling action of de Bourbon, turned with him into one of the darkest avenues of L'étoile.

CHAP. VII.

Aghast at his friend's manner, so different from that of a man returning from one of the noblest shows ever invented by princes, Clarence directly imagined that some deadly affront had been given, and avenged by the Chevalier, and that ruinous consequences were likely to ensue.

"What has happened?" he exclaimed, "is the tournament over?"

"Fatally," was the Chevalier's answer: "the king is killed!"

"The king!" reiterated Clarence. "Not in the lists? — assassinated?"

"Killed by de Lorges, in their encounter with the lance. He is fled to England — all Paris is in consternation."

"Good Heaven!" and not even a

rumour of this dreadful catastrophe has reached us here."

"I have outstripped rumour," resumed the Chevalier. "Ten minutes' conversation with my uncle Condé decided my conduct. I have but dismounted from one horse, to vault upon another, and another, since the direful accident occurred. All Paris were at gaze when I left it: men knowing not what was next to happen, nor which party to espouse, — the Bourbon or the Lorraine. Now, they may make their election! the axe is laid to our root, and by one of our own race!"

Clarence was confounded: at length, recovering his faculties and his speech at once, he asked his friend what peculiar evil to the house of Bourbon was to be apprehended by the death of Henry the Second?"

"The accession of a prince even more a child in capacity than in years," replied de Bourbon, impetuously. "The

real sovereigns will be the uncles of this puppet's Queen — Guise and Lorraine."

"Surely, you forget your own laws," exclaimed Clarence, cheeringly: "is not the first prince of the blood, by right, the guardian of a minor or incompetent king? In that case, your royal uncle of Navarre will hold the reins of government; and every thing then be open to your ambition and your hopes."

"My royal uncle!" repeated Adhemar, bitterly, then more sternly added, "the kingly robe has bewitched him! He, that when Duke de Vendôme affronted death in the bloodiest field of France, bearing him there like a soldier and a gentleman, now shows a timidity of spirit that would disgrace a common hind. He shrinks from an encounter with the Guises! or he loves the secure dominion of his petty, pared kingdom, too well, to risk it for family honour and pure religion. My individual hopes are over, Willoughby." De Bourbon spoke the

last sentence with ghastly calmness, though a slight convulsion passed across his features the next moment.

Clarence, who knew to what that sentence alluded, and how dear that baffled hope was to his friend, now besought him to say more distinctly what had been expected from Anthony of Navarre, what he had refused, and whether, in the event of his abandonment of a post allotted him by God and his country, the Prince de Condé, as next in blood to the throne, might not seize the helm of state? "O Adhemar, if it were you ——"

"Ha! not a word more, as you love me!" interrupted de Bourbon in a thrilling tone, grasping his arm with a force and suddenness which made the latter rock; then disengaging him, after an instant's pause, he added, more temperately, "Condé has not the right you fancy, while Navarre lives. If this dastard uncle of mine suffer himself to be negociated out of his right by the artful

Guises, — and they may bribe high, provided they have influence with our bridegroom of Spain, to regain for him Upper Navarre — if Anthony even hesitate much longer, the golden opportunity is over with us all, and he may wait quietly until they rifle him of the little he palters his honour for now. Our hope is principally in the Protestants; and, if Anthony leaves them but three days, three hours, to the ravening wolves of Lorraine, the fold will be empty when he comes to count his strength there."

"And do you believe that the noble Condé will abide such havoc patiently?" asked Clarence, kindling with indignation. "Do you think he will stand by, and see his fellow-christians led to the slaughter, with or without the forms of justice, and not interfere between them and destruction? Do you think he will suffer himself to be elbowed out of his lawful place by the proud Duke de Guise himself?"

"No; I'll be sworn he will not!" exclaimed Adhemar. "He may — he will assert his station as prince and counsellor. I — I only, can have no place beyond that which Limoges gives me. And if I am neglected, insulted, baited, I shall have no right to call the loyal people of France to the support of the house of Bourbon in my person: I, whose standard so many brave fellows would follow, though it led to certain death, were I but a prince, indeed! — and you would tell me, Willoughby, that the act I have coveted so long is an empty toy! Were I legitimated, by yon Heaven! on the first affront from those Guises, I would blow such a war-blast in their ears as should shake all France, and lay their topping honours in the dust!"

"If it come to that," exclaimed Clarence, catching fire at his words, "I quit not France till the storm is laid. I am a Protestant — the queen to whom I belong is a Protestant — my father is one — and,

surely, it matters not upon what ground I fight for the good cause, and for friends to boot. This arm, this heart, therefore, is yours and the noble Condé's, while they are my own!"

"Make you no salvo for conscience?" asked Adhemar, smiling moodily. "I should not fight for creeds only; and my passions may drive me farther than your principles might like to follow."

"Well, then; with justice for your object, and honour for your guide," Clarence said, after a momentary pause, "I follow wherever you dare to lead."

Adhemar pressed the hand Clarence extended, and fetching a deep breath or two, began more methodically to acquaint his friend with the late events, and the circumstances in which they had placed the first personages of the state. During the ceremonials of the tournament, he related, the king had marked his resolution of depressing the Guises, by one or two of those circumstances

trivial in themselves, but of vital importance when such trifles are often the sole means of one proud noble's taking the lead of another. This public testimony of secret influence was rightly attributed to the disgusts given Henry's mistress by the Cardinal of Lorraine; and to the recovered power of the Connétable de Montmorenci, whom the peace had now released from captivity; it was rapturously hailed by all whom the Guises had offended, and received as a favourable symptom by the princes of the blood themselves.

In the midst of these highly raised hopes, the king received his death-wound; and those who had either any thing to hope or fear from the new reign, dispersed in consternation to their homes, for council, or action, as occasion might demand.

The new king was in fact of an age to govern, having entered his seventeenth year: but a sickly body, and yet feebler

mind, pointed out the necessity of surrounding him with good and able ministers, and granting to the oldest of the Bourbon princes his hereditary place of chief counsellor. This would be, in fact, granting him the real sceptre of France.

It was, however, still in the option of Francis where to bestow such power, since he was declared major; and it therefore became more important than in the case of minority, for Anthony Bourbon to possess himself of the young king's person. Once seated in authority, it was not likely that any one would have the temerity to attempt dislodging him. While the public mind stood all amazed, and incapable, as it were, of determining what minister to contend for, that title unclaimed would of course be immediately seized, either by the Duke de Guise or his brother. The courage and address of the one, and the subtle intrigues of the other, would quietly give them that ascendancy over the Parisians, which

they were too likely to obtain with the king, through the medium of their niece, the beautiful Queen of Scots. Their very bigotry, too, would strengthen this power; the capital being now the strong-hold of catholicism. From the insolence and rapacity of the Guises, the higher noblesse had every bitterness to expect, and the Huguenots every thing to dread from their persecuting intolerance. Two parties were therefore ready for the hand of Anthony Bourbon to wield against the threatening rivals of his house, the invaders of his just rights. At the head of the Catholic malcontents was the Connétable de Montmorenci, whom the Duke de Guise, during the former's captivity, after the battle of St. Quentin, had contrived to despoil of nearly all his high and lucrative posts. At the head of the Protestants, the Admiral Coligny, whose illustrious virtues, joined to eminent talents, gave him unlimited power over those who made conscience

and purity of conduct either their professed or real objects.

Two such parties promptly united, for the legitimate purpose of removing obnoxious foreigners, for so the Lorraine family were considered — from the confidence of the new king, and establishing in their stead the person designed by nature and the laws — were likely enough to succeed in their object, without other force than that of determination and right; but if the person so designated chose to desert himself, neither party could, without the charge of treason, attempt any thing.

Embued with these convictions, and empowered by Montmorenci and Condé to urge the King of Navarre's immediate seizure of the advantages thus offered to him, Adhemar de Bourbon had privily left Paris on the day of the tournament, attended only by one trusty servant, and sought his uncle at Pau, where the court of Navarre now was. There he beheld

Anthony endeavouring to banish the recollection of the mortification he had assayed on the conclusion of the peace, in new indulgences unworthy the dawn of his character.

Continued humour, increasing indolence, some lurking jealousy of his brother Condé's loftier talents, and above all, the apprehension of losing the whole of his Pyrenean dominions, if he thus staked them upon the same die, with which he threw for the rule of France, caused him to hesitate.

Adhemar urged him again and again; repeating every argument to induce his compliance with the wishes of so many zealous friends. But the Guises had their agents in Anthony's familiar council, nay, in his very bosom. The woman for whom he secretly neglected his queen's chaste endearments, was sold to his enemies; and by her persuasion, he determined to wait until it were possible for a distinguishing summons to arrive from

the young king. A day, an hour's delay, was important to the faction of his rivals; and this resolution secured them several:—telling the Chevalier he must take three days to consider of the proposal transmitted through his hands, he dismissed him, to stay or remain at will.

Adhemar retired in disgust and disappointment from his presence; and immediately taking horse again, hastened to unburden his loaded heart to the only friend upon whose disinterested counsel he felt perfect reliance; perhaps, because he was the only one with whom his personal interests could never jar.

"Since Anthony flies his standard," de Bourbon said gloomily, as he concluded, "there is nought but disgrace and defeat to be expected for us even from a struggle. A divided house cannot stand. Would ye counsel me, then, to stay the crush of its fall, or remove myself from the ruin, while it is yet in my power, since my name cannot

serve a cause like this, when that name, so employed, might be spurned by every vulgar heel."

"Counsel, I pretend not to give," exclaimed Clarence, awaking from the stupor of perplexity into which his friend's contradictory state of mind had thrown him. "The only course I see before you all, is to maintain yourselves where God and the laws have placed you, by every open and manly means. Whither such a determination may lead you, and the noble Condé, and through what road, Heaven only can tell: for events must shape your course; be his guide, and yours, treason or loyalty. Loyalty I know it will be: but to resist self-appointed tyrants, you may, perhaps, be forced to embrace measures which others may brand with the name of treason: while your true heart disclaims it, be not daunted by a name, Adhemar. On this occasion, master your sensitiveness to current opinion, and act to

your own conscience alone. Disdain not to take a second place after your uncle Condé, for that would indeed be rebellion in you, which in him were pure honour; and if swords must be drawn at last, let yours be drawn for him, and you may then use it with an unspotted conscience."

"Yes, and perish with an unspotted conscience," returned Adhemar, with a bitter irony, "leaving my name to rot, along with the ignoble herds!"

"To live!—To impart life, you mean! To rouse many a generous soul in after days to yet nobler action!" Clarence spoke with astonishment and reproof.

"No,—I mean to perish!" returned the Chevalier moodily. "Successful or unsuccessful, history will only record the names of Condé, Montpensier, Roche-sur-yon, as the asserters of their own rights, and the rights of religious liberty: I, that have no rights, will be classed with their mere followers, and sink with them in the dark flood of oblivion. Should their

resistance fail, whether in exile, or in their houses, they still remain princes of the blood—and I!—what then am I?"

"Adhemar!" exclaimed Clarence, pierced to the soul by his friend's distempered sensibility: "what fatal blindness seals the eyes of your reason upon this subject, and this alone? How often must I labour to convince you, that the Vicomte de Limoges is honoured for himself; that his valour in the field, and stainless manners in the midst of a corrupt court, give that authority to his actions which no patent of nobility, however illustrious, can add to, or abate? If the shock of parties does come, surely you must rejoice that your motives cannot be suspected. In adhering to your uncle Condé, you will yield at once to the claims of gratitude, and of kindred; and, determined to stand or fall with him, history will record, that your aim through life was true honour, not mere nominal distinction."

"In truth, I speak I know not what!" answered de Bourbon, in evident disorder of every faculty: "there is no other course for me, I admit, than what your rarely generous spirit would voluntarily seek for itself; but I must exhale some of my resentment against my uncle Anthony; since it is his temporising conduct, which may force us into measures as dangerous as fruitless. Would he step at once into the place Heaven has opened for him, each individual Bourbon might retain his honours without prejudice to peace, or loyalty, or public faith: his power could then realize for me the desire of my soul; and that attained, he might distribute titles, places, emoluments, where he chose: *my* cup would be full!"

"It will — it shall be thus filled at last, be certain, dearest friend!" exclaimed Clarence, generous concern and devoted attachment glistening in his eye. "Continue to deserve this desire of your soul,

and Heaven is too just to withhold it always!"

"If both, or either of my uncles had your heart towards me," said de Bourbon, "I should not shrink from any sacrifice for their sakes. Zealous suitors are seldom unsuccessful; and even the proud spirit of Condé might have stooped to earnestness for another. Let that pass, however."

Clarence would again have taken up the often disputed theme of the Prince de Condé's sincerity, and have dwelt upon the justice and nobleness of his preferring public to private claims upon every great occasion, but de Bourbon's impatience of the subject seemed strongly augmented; and his feelings so irritated by the coil of circumstances wound round him, that he was no longer able to command his language, or moderate his sentiments.

Clarence was more shocked and grieved at this than he permitted his thoughts to

dwell on: he saw that his friend was torn between resentment and honourable purpose; that he foresaw probable ruin from embracing the party of the princes, all of whom he deemed undeserving of such a sacrifice from him; yet that he heard the calls of kindred, and duty, and character, summoning him to dare every thing by their side, in opposition to those maternal relations by whom he was spurned.

But for this poisoned idea of the Prince de Condé, Clarence felt assured that Adhemar would not have hesitated a moment, in taking the generous part. Compassionating, rather than blaming him, though amazed at the suspicion itself, he delicately endeavoured to awaken him more completely to the demands of patriotism, by dwelling on the disgrace and danger of Navarre's conduct, in circumstances something similar. The Chevalier was electrified by the obvious resemblance; and Clarence no sooner

perceived the effect he had produced, than he hastened to mix hope with duty. He repeated it, as his own opinion, that it was impossible for the head of the Bourbons and of the reformed Church to do worse than to hesitate; that he must eventually decide for the conduct befitting his rank and foregone estimation; and that, consequently, they who wished to influence him on this point ought not to quit his side till their importunities or their arguments had roused him into action.

So cogent was Clarence's reasoning, or so vehement his persuasion, that he rapidly transferred into his friend's breast the confidence and resolution natural to his own. "By your own rule," he said smilingly, "be an earnest suitor, and despair not of success."

De Bourbon was ashamed that he had been so easily repulsed; and accepting Clarence's hasty offer of accompanying him by day-break the next morning to

Pau, and thence to Paris, he confessed to his own thoughts, for he could not bring himself to do it to his friend, that upon some occasions there is more true dignity of soul in submitting to insolence and humour, than in braving or retreating from them.

After nearly three hours spent thus in the venerable avenues of L'étoile, the friends agreed to adjourn to the house, that de Bourbon might retire for refreshment, and rest secure from disturbance; while Clarence employed himself in arrangements for his own departure, and in apprizing Madame de Roche Blanc of the new guest she was likely to see at supper.

As the Chevalier's stay was to be so short, and as he had already been seen by part of the family from the chateau, it was deemed more delicate and respectful in him to join the domestic circle at L'étoile, without particular reference to Lolótte; in short, to act as though what

had previously passed were to be considered solely as an accidental humour in that unfortunate young creature. And as it was of consequence to keep the king's death concealed as long as possible, until the resolution of Anthony Bourbon should be declared, Clarence proposed waving this information altogether.

In these resolutions, and with more cheerfulness at the end of their long conference than either had felt at its commencement, they took the way to to the house; when, having entered by a private door, Clarence conducted the Chevalier to a bedchamber, for short repose, while he sent their purposed message to Madame de Roche Blanc, and then proceeded to settle some necessary business with the steward.

The agitation of our hero's mind was such, that although he endeavoured to give due attention to every greater or lesser concern submitted to him by his father's

grey-headed agent, he scarcely knew, in fact, to what he was assenting or disapproving; a confusion of images then rose before him, troubling rather than animating him. He foresaw a great crisis impending over his French connections; and, for the first time since their knowledge of each other, felt a dread that it would prove too much for Adhemar de Bourbon to meet firmly. How painful was the apprehension to one like Clarence, who would willingly have had that friend equal to the most arduous situations, and covered with their consequent glory! It was too apparent, from his present perturbed state, that there was a feeble part in Adhemar's mind, and a vulnerable one in his heart. To what might not the distrustingness of the one, and the timidity of the other, lead him in great conjunctures? Was he endued only with courage and conduct in the field? And were all the resources of that study and reflection, for which he

was remarkable in an age of glimmering knowledge, and from which were expected so much, to prove fruitless of decisive and judicious action? Clarence saw with amazement, and felt with anguish, that unless he kept steadily by the side of de Bourbon, applying all his fortunate ascendancy to the task of repairing the latter's confidence in his uncle, he would either fall a prey to the machinations of the adverse faction, or resign himself to gloom, and inaction, and subsequent remorse.

To remain, therefore, with a friend more tenderly loved than ever, though now less romantically idolized, was Clarence's fixed determination; but at what expense he might be called upon to keep that determination he knew not. It was possible that his own fortunes in England might depend upon his presence there, when the critical situation of his friends in France might chain him to their side. If so, he thought his fortunes must be

cast upon the waters, obedient to the breath of Heaven. His first obligations were to the Bourbon princes; and he flattered himself, with the natural credulity of youth, that his own sovereign could not look long with an eye of displeasure even upon temporary neglect of favour, if such seeming disrespect were the consequence of gratitude to former benefactors.

Adhemar de Bourbon had once saved his life, and distinguished him with his notice, when he was an obscure stripling: the Prince de Condé had espoused his claims, given him his interest in England for their furtherance, and added to it the distinction of a post in his own household. How could Clarence Willoughby ever hope to repay such obligations even in part, except by devoting himself, upon every occasion which offered, to their general benefit? At this juncture he would be rendering them an essential service, if he might sustain that

confidence on the part of Adhemar, without which his co-operation with the rest of his family must be precarious or revolting.

Relying on his father's approbation of any measure dictated by gratitude and affection, Clarence had made no reservation in his pledges to the Chevalier, and though he felt unusual reluctance to quit L'étoile, now that Aigline de Venzeles was an inmate there, he repented not that he had consented to do so thus suddenly. Clarence saw that he was dear, very dear to Aigline: he knew of no rival; and, although her affection was not of a nature to satisfy a passionate lover, it was tender and lively enough to warrant the hope of changing its character, whenever he should avow her power over his happiness, and plead for a return.

To leave her now was, therefore, painful, but not agonizing: he might carry with him the fond belief of being dearer

to her than any other living being; and delight himself with the hope of one day animating that innocent affection into the most exclusive, conscious preference: he even flattered himself that Aigline must have understood, upon reflection, the meaning of many expressions which his own embarrassment, and her pure unconsciousness at the time he uttered them, had caused him to leave imperfect; and that, consequently, her unchanged manner, afterwards, argued tacit encouragement. Thus he ventured to repose upon the idea of leaving, at least, a floating suspicion of his tender purpose upon her mind, as a sort of preservative against new impressions, until a quieter moment should arrive, in which he might seek her heart with the approbation of his father, (a blessing he never doubted,) and that at a time when he might have a brilliant destiny to bid her share. The present, indeed, was no longer a time fit for thoughts of soft

transport; and never went two lovers with such abstracted looks into the company dearest to them, as did Adhemar de Bourbon and Clarence into that of Aigline and Lolótte. Refreshed in body, and soothed in spirit by some hours of solitude, the Chevalier entered the saloon of L'étoile with his usual grace and dignity; at once placing himself by the side of Madame de Roche Blanc, engaging her in courteous conversation upon the good mien and quick capacity of her little son, whom he had seen in the anti-chamber at Pau; and but now and then turning his darkly-shaded eyes, fraught with dangerous softness, upon the aspen-like Lolótte, who was hanging bashfully over his dog, which having recognised her again, had bounded into her arms upon entering.

Cecile, fatigued and fevered, was happily gone to bed, so that Clarence gave himself up, without fear of distraction from her little pertnesses, to the enjoy-

ment of this last evening at his home with Aigline. He was surprised to observe how pale and tremulous she looked, and how anxiously her eyes seemed questioning his, all the time he was talking with her mother, while she sat at a distance over her frame of tapestry-work. His flutter of joy, at this shew of peculiar interest in his sudden departure, ended in a sense of his own fond vanity; when, on approaching her, she asked him in a low, eager voice, whether the Chevalier had indeed brought no ill news from England? On assuring her that he had not, that he believed his father was as well and cheerful as when they last heard of him, her countenance cleared at once into rainbow brightness, and Clarence's heart sunk under the conviction that his father at least was as dear as himself.

"But I go away to-morrow, Aigline," he said, bending over her work as if inspecting its colours; "when to return, it

is impossible to say. Will you promise to think of me while I am away, as kindly as you think of me now?"

"Need I promise it, Clarence?" Aigline's voice and smile, as she just glanced her dewy eyes on him, and then returned them to her work, while she asked this question, were not calculated to calm an agitated heart: they excited, without satisfying hope; and they were, therefore, only the more formed to irritate his impatience for a confirmation of what he wished. While his faltering tongue was framing a sentence more explanatory of his feelings than any he had yet had courage to utter, Aigline suddenly enquired whether he was going to England.

"No — only to Paris."

"Ah, then, I care not!" she exclaimed, the colour, which had deserted her cheek at that idea, now vividly returning to it. "While no sea parts me from my friends, distance is nothing —

by comparison — and you will be coming soon again to L'étoile: I know you will."

"If you wish it, Aigline."

Aigline raised her eyes again at the unusual tone of his voice; and the strong emotion visible in his countenance made her regard him fixedly. — "Something extraordinary has happened, dear Clarence, I am certain," she said in a low, earnest tone. "Does any thing afflict you, or have you merely heard something to engage your thoughts powerfully? I ask not what it is."

Clarence perceived that she was yet far from imagining herself, in any degree, the cause of his present emotion, and resigning himself with a sigh to the temporary mortification, answered, with a dispirited air, that public events were the only subjects he had been discussing with the Chevalier;—adding, in a lowered voice, that she must refrain from asking any questions about the tournament,

although he could not just then inform her why.

"And you expect me to obey you, after exciting my curiosity thus!" she exclaimed, rising from her seat; then casting on him one of those looks, which her eyes alone seemed made to give, a look of arch rebellion endeavouring to disguise the true submissiveness of her will, she hastened to get near her sister, and give her some other occupation than the too flattering one of caressing the Chevalier's greyhound.

"I fancy Iris resents my having left her behind me when I was last at Nerac," observed de Bourbon, approaching them, as Aigline would have turned the pretty animal towards him. "She seems disposed to give herself to one of gentler mood than her present neglectful master — therefore, if Mademoiselle la Marot will honour him by accepting —" he finished the sentence by putting the col-

lar, which encircled Iris's slender neck, into the trembling hand of Lolótte.

Startled — astonished, at first she looked painfully bewildered; some unmeaning expressions escaped her; but her heart assisting her feeble faculty and Aigline's whispered explanation, she directed a look of passionate intreaty to her mother, which was answered by grave permission to accept the offered honour of such a present. Lolótte's joy would have been wildly immoderate at this, had not terror of her mother, and, perhaps, that modesty instinctive in her character, restrained its outward extravagance; even as it was, she threw her arms round the beautiful little creature, and pressed it to her bosom. The action was simply that of childish pleasure; yet the Chevalier turned away in disorder from the sight of her beaming, enraptured countenance; and scarcely conscious what he did, passed his hand across Aigline's lute. The sound he drew from it at-

tracted Clarence's attention, and glad to seize such a method of calming Aigline's evident perturbation about her sister, and of soothing all their spirits, he besought his friend to accompany the instrument with his voice.

De Bourbon hesitated; yet was it neither the hesitation of vanity, nor of embarrassment; the expressive look he gave his friend, and the smile of melancholy disdain which accompanied it, informed Aigline that matters of such import occupied him, as rendered these elegant resources of peaceful privacy "flat, stale, and unprofitable." He took up the lute, however, and with a voice rich, deep, but tinctured with such extraordinary mournfulness, as if its mere tones were intended by nature

"To send the hearers weeping to their beds,"

sang to a wild air this address of some uncouth poet to the Thrush: —

Call, blissful bird, call to thy mate!
Thy bliss, no fate
Cruel destroys:
Green leaves thy home prepare,
Berries thy fare,
Nature thy joys!

But I, like some plundered bird,
'Mid darkling copses heard,
Wailing her nest;
Mourn, that pale poverty
Dooms my own love and me
Ne'er to know rest!

Even our choice of a song is generally determined by our humour of the moment; and Adhemar de Bourbon's feelings were thus betrayed to his friend, by his selection of one so different from his ordinary taste in music and poetry. Madame de Roche Blanc was the only person present who could speak the pleasure his voice had given her, and she uttered several common place civilities upon the occasion; while Lolótte stood panting and entranced, her radiant eyes fixed upon his face, waiting to see his lips un-

close again, and to hear those sounds issue thence, which had almost breathed into her angel form a rational soul. Confused and affected by this sensibility in her, he would then have put the lute into Aigline's hand, had he not beheld her cheeks, — blushing to be so discovered, — glistening through tears. The expressive smile with which she gently motioned the lute away, was too complimentary to be unnoticed by de Bourbon: his ambition had never been to outshine others in the lighter graces, and a gratified but tranquil bend of the head, was his only notice of the evident enchantment he had caused.

Clarence's pulse beat not so temperately: for the first time in his life he felt the keen shaft of jealousy quivering in his heart; it could not lodge there, when its object was Adhemar de Bourbon.

Recovering from the transient pang with a face of crimson, and every fibre vibrating from its powerful seizure, he

advanced to the side of Aigline, and said something admiring, he knew not what, about the song and the singer. At the sound of his voice, Aigline turned her face towards him, with such beaming pleasure at their sympathy of taste, that he ceased to envy de Bourbon his power of bathing that enchanting face in tears. He would have told her so, perhaps, had not others been near them; as it was, he merely returned her speaking glance, and drawing Lolótte towards a seat, kindly endeavoured to withdraw her rapt attention from the Chevalier, by talking to her of the song, and promising to write the notes for her, if she would learn it from her sister's teaching. Aigline, in the same view, now took the lute, and struck its chords with a light and graceful hand, mingling her silver tones with the acuter ones of the instrument, in a gay and fanciful air: while she sang, the playful variations of her youthful countenance heightened the sportive

character of her song; and as these were evidently directed to Lolótte, Clarence felt them doubly charming, from their testimony to her sisterly affection, and to her freedom from vanity.

There was not, indeed, one look or action of Aigline's, which betrayed the slightest disposition to coquetry; she obviously admired both the Chevalier's grace and accomplishments, yet she seemed not to have the least idea of attracting his attention peculiarly to herself. To prevent Lolótte from becoming too much absorbed by one feeling, and, at the same time, to ward off an exposure of her melancholy childishness, and their mother's harshness, seemed the business of Aigline's life. How then could she fail to interest and attach a heart like Clarence's, enthusiastic in its admiration of the amiable, and the self-denying virtues?

Their slight supper was no sooner over, than he engaged Madame de Roche

Blanc at chess, leaving Aigline and the Chevalier no escape from conversation together. What is so natural as the wish of making those we love and admire, intimately known to each other?

The room in which this small party were collected, looked upon one of the most beautiful and secluded parts of the ground near L'étoile; the sun was long set, and twilight had gradually stolen over the scene; but it rested so softly upon every object, that it seemed as if the very woods, enamoured of its charm, only whispered in the air, lest they should awaken the sleeping landscape. The stillness and the loveliness of all things without, caused the Chevalier to make an observation of this kind to Aigline as he placed himself beside her in an opened window, and the answer of her kindling countenance, encouraged him to proceed.

"Might we not imagine," he said, "some mysterious, melancholy Spirit in

those woods, roaming through such nights as these, among their green depths, in silence and solitude? Do you not fancy you hear his voice?"

"I might have imagined it, at one time this evening." Aigline could not resist the temptation of saying this; but the Chevalier might not have caught the involuntary compliment, had not her instant disorder of eyes and complexion pointed it out. He bowed, and coloured too, and for a moment mutual embarrassment kept them silent: he soon recovered himself; and yielding to the sweet impressions of the hour, the scene, and the companion, glided from such observations as are merely the result of natural sensibility and taste, to those which we may expect from a mind deeply tinctured with learning and philosophy, consequently fertile in noble and interesting associations.

As Aigline listened to him, and occasionally exchanged a speaking glance

with his remoter friend, she thrilled with the pleasing consciousness of de Bourbon's being really worthy Clarence's enthusiastic devotedness. There was a loftiness, an originality, a touching pensiveness in all the former's sentiments, which interested a romantic, inexperienced nature like hers; there was a something, in short, which, with equal philosophy, and, perhaps, more learning in the Abbé de Fontevraud, she had always missed in his. It was every thing she wished for in the bosom friend of her dear friend; and as such, she not only listened to the Chevalier with as much delight as attention, but gradually flowed into confidence and eloquence herself.

She spoke of Mr. Willoughby, describing his unboastful goodness and tranquil habits: she described the days she had spent with him in the purest enjoyment; and, as she painted him, alternately presiding with a placid smile over the plea-

sures he provided for others, or walking with the same smile on his features under his beautiful avenues, with a book of prayer in his hand, the Chevalier sighed profoundly; thought of the court and its turmoil, and devoutly wished that he had learned to find happiness in peace, and privacy, and devotion.

Lolótte, meanwhile, contented to hear and to see, without understanding what was said, or conscious that she was not likely to see that face and form again, which she was now beholding with such wondering transport as she would have gazed upon stars, stood in motionless silence beside them, flushing into brighter beauty at every lingering fixture of the Chevalier de Bourbon's eye, and trembling inwardly between the dread of being called away by her mother, and the joy of remaining where she was.

Now and then Aigline could not help looking on her, till her own heart ached, and her thoughts wandered from the sub-

jects discussed by the Chevalier. So beautiful as this dear sister was, — so exceedingly beautiful, that the eye never fell on her without the lip longing to proclaim the transport of admiration she inspired: so obviously susceptible of blameless attachment, yet denied the mind which could alone ensure, or preserve a return of such attachment!

The alternate glow and sadness of the Chevalier's regards, as they rested upon Lolótte, convinced Aigline that he sympathised in her feelings; and she would have felt a warmer and more pitying interest in him, had it not been checked by the immediate reserve under which he shrouded his countenance, whenever he found her looking at him. Involuntarily, Aigline contrasted this reserved dignity of character with the rasher frankness of Clarence Willoughby. Early prepossession, perhaps, made her give the preference to the latter.

Nay, even their countenances shared

the same fate. Of de Bourbon, it might have been said, —

"Where all that's dark, and all that's bright,
"Meets in the aspect and the eyes."

Positive beauty was, indeed, there, and the interest of mysteriousness in addition: for the expressions of that aspect were not often legible to persons who had not studied them deeply. But on Clarence's open brow, the free soul shone like the sun at noon-day; no cloud of care or humour was ever thick enough to obscure it entirely.

"And never be it darkened, I pray Heaven!" Aigline inwardly ejaculated, as she made this observation. "Never be it so, by one shade of intentional wrong, or shame! and then, be thy fate what it may, my greater share in thee will be pride and joy!"

While these thoughts were occupying Aigline, Clarence, having finished his game with Madame de Roche Blanc, drew nearer to her, and in a low voice

entreated her to consider L'étoile at her disposal, for as long a period as she might find convenient. She was muttering an ungracious assent, coupled with many animadversions upon her husband's thoughtlessness in dismantling the chateau, when the movement of his friend gave him an opportunity of breaking them off, and wishing her farewell.

"Good night! God bless you, Aigline," he hurried out, as he pressed her hand a moment afterwards, with a force and agitation of which he was unconscious, until he found her start. "We shall meet no more for awhile. Yet you will not forget me!"

Aigline would have answered, but her voice unaccountably failed her, and she was forced to stop: she turned away her head, as she did so, yet neither that action nor her speechlessness displeased Clarence.

The Chevalier, meanwhile, gazing on

Lolótte with passionate intentness, as if he were taking in such remembrance of that matchless beauty as might last him through life, mastered a more passionate sigh, turned suddenly away, bowed to Madame de Roche Blanc, looked a more intimate adieu to Aigline, and, gently pushing back Iris towards her new mistress, retreated without speaking from the apartment.

At that moment Clarence thought solely of his friend; but the sound of Aigline's voice answering a perturbed enquiry of her sister's, made him turn round: he then observed, that Lolótte was standing pale and amazed in the middle of the room, and that Madame de Roche Blanc was rising with a portentous brow.

"If you feel obliged to my noble friend," he exclaimed, too precipitately, perhaps, "I beseech you, dear Madame, be indulgent to any unfortunate sensi-

bility here;" and he glanced at the weeping Lolótte. "Such a promise would repay him amply; I am sure it would."

Clarence's kindly nature judged his friend's by itself; and, in this instance, judged it rightly. Cold, indeed, must be the heart, which, when it either cannot, or must not cherish the affection it has inspired, leaves that affection to desolation, without feeling, or show of concern!

For de Bourbon the arrow was doubly barbed; at least to Clarence's peculiar turn of mind, so it appeared. For in addition to the restraint imposed by disparity of rank, was the pain of knowing Lolótte incapable of comprehending the implied reason for his avoidance of her sensibility and of his own. Clarence's countenance expressed something of this as he gave a second look at Aigline, and smiling, though not with "his wonted cheer," in reply to Madame de Roche Blanc's tardy assent to his entreaty, followed the Chevalier.

transport; and never went two lovers with such abstracted looks into the company dearest to them, as did Adhemar de Bourbon and Clarence into that of Aigline and Lolótte. Refreshed in body, and soothed in spirit by some hours of solitude, the Chevalier entered the saloon of L'étoile with his usual grace and dignity; at once placing himself by the side of Madame de Roche Blanc, engaging her in courteous conversation upon the good mien and quick capacity of her little son, whom he had seen in the anti-chamber at Pau; and but now and then turning his darkly-shaded eyes, fraught with dangerous softness, upon the aspen-like Lolótte, who was hanging bashfully over his dog, which having recognised her again, had bounded into her arms upon entering.

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CHAP. VII.

That morning light, which, as it strengthened and brightened, exhilarated the spirits of those who had quitted L'étoile, shone upon some that remained there, without dispersing a single shadow from their darkened hearts.

Lolótte, comprehending that she was to see the Chevalier no more, had wept and wandered through the whole night, refusing to go to bed; dejectedly placing herself sometimes at the windows of the old-fashioned chamber in which she and her sister were lodged, sometimes on the floor, where she sat murmuring indistinct complaints, or trying to repeat the air sung by de Bourbon.

Aigline had her own share of regrets; but these she stifled, solicitous only to soothe the distraction of Lolótte,—a task peculiarly difficult, where reason could not be applied for the purpose, and where the most efficient engine was precisely that which Aigline held in abhorrence—fear.

The affections of such as have few ideas, but loving natures, partake in some degree of the character of mere instinct; and depending rather on sensation than reflection, are not subject to change, from change in their objects. There are less means also for combating such affections, at the disposal of those who would divert their limited intellects from the one pernicious theme of reverie. In the present instance, Aigline found this difficulty almost unconquerable. At first she soothed, and then sought to amuse; and though she saw with grief that her indulgent pity evidently freed Lolótte from curb over her feelings, she had not the stern reso-

lution necessary to yield her up to their mother's harsher measures. Assisted by the counsel of the good Thomasine, she sought to screen the depth of poor Lolótte's susceptibility from every eye; from those especially which ever looked too severely upon human infirmity: determining, however, to use gentle, though firm methods of management, for the purpose of eradicating this unfortunate impression.

The paroxysm of frantic transport into which Lolótte was thrown by the unexpected sight of the Chevalier, at daybreak, was followed by as childish a passion of impatience, when her sister refused to open the window and induce him to speak. She wanted only to hear his voice, she said; and she asked for that gratification, with the innocent passionateness of an infant entreating for the repetition of the chime that pleased its ear, or the tale that moved its heart. On Aigline's tender refusal, tears and

sullen sadness had succeeded; and it was in the midst of these that de Bourbon had looked up, and caught a glimpse of Lolótte, just as Thomasine withdrew her from the window.

For that whole day Lolótte was completely unmanageable; but as her humour happily led her to obstinacy in solitude, Madame de Roche Blanc was not irritated by the suspicion it might have caused, into any of that arbitrary harshness which she never deemed blameable, when applied to the few sensibilities of such unfortunates as her daughter.

Aigline, meanwhile, exerted herself to gratify and occupy her mother, endeavouring, by double cheerfulness in her own manner, to screen poor Lolótte's dejection from particular notice. Thus she left herself no time for that fathoming of her own heart, which might have shown her how deeply Clarence Willoughby's ripened character and ardent affection had sunk there, and how dis-

mally she would any day feel the absence of both. From the hour of his sudden departure, Madame de Roche Blanc did not, as formerly, seem totally to forget him; on the contrary, she spoke of him with a due measure of commendation for his obligingness and charm of temper; avowedly gave him credit for much conduct, as she termed it, in so young a man, so greatly distinguished by distinguished men; yet, whether purposely, or merely in consequence of her habitual attachment to the dark side of life, left after every conversation about him, the impression upon her daughter's mind, that she thought his virtues and affections, built, like those of many others as seeming true and warm, upon shifting sands; and that, after he should be transplanted to another country, and engage there in new connections and new interests, his early friends of humbler destinies, must prepare to find themselves almost forgotten.

Against the authority of experience, the youthful, secluded Aigline had not the presumption to oppose her own arguments, dictated by mere feeling; she, therefore, yielded sighing assent to her mother's saddening doctrine of general instability, reserving to herself only the privilege of making one dear exception. A wiser head than that of a young and affectionate girl, might have made a similar exception without meriting blame. Clarence's stability had already been strongly, if not long tried; — business and pleasure, glory and vanity, had each beset him, yet had he twice returned to the home of his boyhood, with all his native simplicity and warmth of heart untarnished. This impression was, indeed, too just, as well as powerful, for arbitrary eloquence to alter; so that Madame de Roche Blanc's remarks produced an effect exactly the reverse of what she intended, making Aigline only rate Clarence the higher, when she compared his

character with her mother's picture of mankind as she had found them.

The reason of their young neighbour's abrupt departure, which had occasioned some speculation amongst the few inhabitants of the valley, was quickly manifested to them, as to his friends at L'étoile. The unfortunate death of the French King, once made known in the towns, flew like light through every mountain-pass that could boast a single habitation. Business was interrupted—speculation and apprehension succeeded.—Lower Navarre, Bearn, and Gascony, had so long been the refuge of persecuted Hugonots, that the conduct of the sovereign who swayed these principalities, became an object of vital importance to them. His movements, therefore, were anxiously enquired about, by the pastor of Roche Blanc, in common with other Protestant teachers, and he brought the information regularly to L'étoile.—From him Aigline heard the details of the fatal

twentieth of July; and easily comprehending the advantage of secrecy on such an event, while the fate of so many thousands hung on the prompt decision of Anthony, felt instantly reconciled to Clarence's unusual reserve. From the clear view given her of the religious part of the subject, by the village pastor, and by distinct recollection of Clarence's frequent conversations upon the mutual rivalry of the Princes of the Blood with the Princes of Lorraine, she was enabled to understand the reason of Adhemar de Bourbon's allusions to the future constancy or desertion of friends. Her heart then glowed with the consciousness that one friend, at least, would never desert him.

Interested in the Chevalier for his own sake, as for that of him who prized him dearest, she became the most eager politician of Roche Blanc, gathering every fragment of real news, nay, every doubtful rumour, with an anxiety which would have made her absent friends smile.

For some days, the irresolution of their king kept the refugees of Navarre in painful suspense: but, at length, the importunities of his nephew were known to prevail, and he announced his intention of proceeding to the court of France.

Intoxicated with joy and gratitude, the people ran in crowds to the royal residence, calling down upon their sovereign the benediction of Heaven, and triumphing in the noble prospect of religious and political liberty, which his expected domination opened to their hopes.

In the midst of a multitude of all ages, sexes, and conditions, with his nephew by his side, and Clarence Willoughby in his suite, Anthony proceeded without other pomp, from Pau to Nerac; whence he was to set forward for the court of France, with that magnificence of retinue, which suited his high station, and probable destiny.

The first movement of their sovereign was too momentous to the interests of

his Pyrenean subjects, not to be distinguished by the only honours they could render him, that of crowding to witness his departure. Aigline's heart beat with uncontrollable agitation, when she was invited to accompany the pastor of their valley and his wife to Pau, to see the ceremony. The instant of time required by her mother, ere she would give or withhold her consent, seemed an age to Aigline: at last the decision was made; Aigline went.

All emotion, curiosity, vague expectation, and as vague fear, (for it was the first public spectacle she had ever been taken to), she scarcely knew what was said to her, by her sober companions, while they were performing their brief journey. She fancied herself solely engrossed by the general enthusiasm for the great personage they were going to behold, by the cause itself, and by the prospect of an unknown pleasure. Had she looked steadily at her own feelings, she

would have found that they were partly of a tender and private nature.

Arrived at Pau, and placed advantageously in a window, she cast but a careless glance down the lines of the principal street, which was strewed in some places with flowers, in others, covered with cloths of gold and silver, with silks, velvets, and homelier testimonies of homage: her eyes stationed themselves where the king and his household would first be visible. The trampling of horses, and a sudden acclamation, proclaimed the approach of the cavalcade. The king and the Chevalier de Bourbon rode first, followed by about thirty gentlemen on horseback; and, at some distance, as many more of inferior rank. Both Anthony and Adhemar de Bourbon were uncovered, bowing to the people as they passed: the former, with insinuating graciousness; the latter, with a noble and becoming gravity. The pastor of Roche Blanc remarked this with appro-

bation, asking Aigline, after the principal personages were passed, whether she ever saw a countenance more expressive than the Chevalier's, of a deep and awful sense of the present crisis. Aigline started out of her own thoughts: she had been absorbed by the appearance of Clarence Willoughby.

Nobly and martially attired, managing a spirited horse with equal fire, yet perfect ease, laughing and talking with those about him with all that gaiety of heart which the success of his friend's efforts had created — to her eyes he appeared nobler and handsomer than any one present. She had never seen him thus before; and the impression was so vivid, that it produced upon her all the effect of a first-sight admiration.

Whether it were this new impression, or the subtle operation of unnoticed sympathy with his half-explained attachment during their last abode together, it

is not easy to determine. Whatever it was, she felt a secret throbbing at her heart, unlike all she had ever known before: — till, as she gazed on him, a confusion of undefinable emotions, of dear remembrances, of flattering imaginations, changed that gentle throbbing, into quicker and more agitated motion. She saw not, meanwhile, the ardent eyes of many a cavalier, caught and fixed as they rode along, by the flashing beauty of her wildly-lovely countenance, and by the youthful charm of her graceful form, bending forward from the window. She only saw, after some brief moments of delighted, expecting watching, that Clarence passed, without noticing her. The omission was accidental; but it sunk Aigline's spirits in spite of reason; and the consequent mortification and depression of this disappointment, formed a sufficient counterbalance to the foregone gratification. Thus, is the every-day of life chequered like its whole sum!

"There! — there goes our Clarence!" exclaimed the artless pastor, with that familiar appropriation permitted by the primitiveness of village manners. He then remarked his sunshine of countenance, and gallant mien; praised him for returning from two campaigns with the same kind nature he carried away; and for bringing from the artificial circles of a court, all his old simplicity and sincerity. "I know little of these pernicious places," added the plain divine, "but I hear fearful things of them. God grant they may not spoil that noble nature, nor change that open look!" — Aigline's heart swelled with such affectionate transport, as the worthy man uttered this, that she could have thrown her arms around his neck, and blessed him for the prayer. Her emotion changed, as his wife said, in her small, calm voice, "I wonder what lucky woman is destined for him? You know, they say, he will be a very great man in England, when he

comes to his right. So I do hope he will not choose a Parisian lady, but wait and marry in his own country."

A sensation like a sword of ice, cleaving her heart in twain, suddenly seized Aigline. She questioned its cause but an instant: as instant alarm at the nature of her own emotion, and recollection of her many pledges to her mother, were the consequence. She then resolutely extinguished this unusual thought of Clarence; extinguished even its remembrance; until long afterwards, when many a similar one forced that remembrance to revive!

Anxious to interest herself otherwise, she looked round, enquiring for her brother. She was told that the queen and her children were at Nerac, consequently as François belonged to their service, he was not likely to make one in the train of the king. Deeply interested by the lively hopes and enthusiasm of the crowd around her, and but partially, because selfishly disappointed, Aigline re-

turned home: where all that she had seen formed the topic of discourse for an hour, and was then discarded. The Baronness took small concern in public joys or griefs; and the Baron was gone off with as many liveried retainers as he could muster, to meet the monarch in Gascony, and there form part of his voluntary and statelier escort towards Vendôme.

The public events which successively followed this day, were not in harmony with the expectation it had raised in such a political novice as Aigline; she heard, after a time, that the King of Navarre had disappointed every one; or rather had fulfilled the secret prediction of the discerning few. To them, his protection of, and communion with the Hugonots in his own dominions, while he outwardly conformed at the court of Paris to the rites of the Romish church, seemed rather the effect of a passion for popularity and patronage, than prudence com-

bined with principle. They were not surprised, therefore, to learn that such lukewarm religion was easily put to silence by worldly hopes and fears.

A deputation from all the Protestant ministers and nobles of the surrounding provinces had followed him to his first resting place; offering — the one their zealous ministry, the other, their lives and fortunes to be at his disposal, provided he would openly assert their rights, and as openly make profession of their pure doctrines. The boldness and dignity of such a step, it was fairly argued, would be likely to awe and consternate the Lorraine faction to a degree which would render them uncertain how to proceed against the first prince of the blood, or enforce laws which must touch his life in common with those of humbler heretics; and if he presented himself at court with the noblemen and gentlemen ready to follow him, each numerously attended, the strength of the oppressed

would then manifest itself, and the young king be instructed in the wishes of his people. Anthony's insinuating address also, would produce a favourable effect upon his royal kinsman, it was believed; and if so, the Guises must give place to one authorized by his birth, and the suffrages of the nation, to demand the offices they now usurped.

Neither Anthony's graces nor affability, nor yet the memory of his splendid military achievements, when Duke de Vendôme, could blind this respectable body to the timid and selfish policy of his refusal. He excused himself from the bold measure of declaring himself a Protestant, as such imprudence, he said, might prove an insurmountable obstacle to his obtaining the reins of government; promising that when once they were in his hands, he would publicly sanction the religion he now secretly favoured, and redress all grievances. Till then, he must dissimulate some of his sentiments, lest

the king himself should take alarm at the probable changes they should lead to, and so exclude him authoritatively from his council.

Against this temporising policy, the warriors and statesmen cried out, as unfit for a crisis like the present, when much must be risked by the individual, if he tried to attain any thing for the general good; while the indignant ministers of religion forbade Anthony to ask a blessing from that God upon his arms, whom he thus feared to acknowledge. Equally disappointed, both parties withdrew in disgust and dissatisfaction; while Adhemar de Bourbon, with bitter mortification, and Clarence Willoughby, with deeper disdain, retired also. De Bourbon had an ostensible errand to his uncle Condé; and Clarence, as attached to the prince's retinue, had the excuse of duty.

Neither of them were inclined to wait, and share the contempt which both foresaw must follow this conduct in the head

of the Bourbons; they gladly, therefore, seized the opportunity of hastening from him, to the companionship of a more intrepid spirit.

Resolved to rouse the hero in the soul of his brother, if it were not absolutely dead, Condé assembled all the strength of their princely race at Vendôme, where Anthony had appointed to meet him. His own ardent heart was flaming with public and private injuries. The Guises had by this time possessed themselves of the young king's person, and under his name were beginning to persecute and insult every protestant or catholic adherent of the princes of the blood. Condé dissembled not his personal resentment, while he proclaimed his more wrathful sense of national wrong: and as he called upon the chevaliers of France to resist the usurpation of self-elected despots, he boldly challenged them, by the memory of his great ancestors, to avenge the insults

offered to himself and to the other princes of his name. Inflamed by the plain eloquence of generous passions, the nobles and gentlemen, who were retired in sullen vexation to their homes, after this cold dismissal of Navarre, now rallied back to their first resolutions; and reassembling once more, offered their lives and fortunes for his service. But the precious moment was over. Anthony had, in fact, forfeited the confidence of both parties, and, without that, neither of them were likely to go dauntlessly forward under his leading, even to the point they most wished to reach. The great heads of the two councils, such as Coligny, Montmorenci, and men who could not be suspected of timidity or selfishness, and who had at first advised the boldest and swiftest measures, now saw, that the spell of enthusiasm being broken, and the Guise faction in actual possession of the government, negociation and circumspection were the only

instruments left their unfortunate brothers in faith.

In vain did the fiery Condé struggle like a lion in the toils, to break those strong cords of reason, which he submitted to, though most unwillingly, at last. In vain did Adhemar de Bourbon endeavour to persuade these sages of the council, that the same facility of being cajoled and duped by false advisers, and perfidious confidants, which had caused Anthony's late delay, would bar his advancement in the path of mere policy; and that he would probably suffer himself to be ensnared by plausible promises, until his rivals had contrived to despoil him of his remaining strength.

In despite of this reasoning, just in itself, only passion and inexperience could believe the favourable moment not passed away. To conduct a difficult and bold enterprise, a character was necessary combining dignity and intrepidity of soul with the right to act in the

given way. — The right was in Anthony's hands; — the dauntless spirit in his brother's. Since they could not be combined, — (for what spirit can successfully prompt another, for any continuance?) the plan of intimidation was given up; and Anthony, too happy to have so respectable a sanction for obeying his own wishes, though little aware of the contempt he merited, terminated the debate, by announcing his belief that if he presented himself at court, without any show of seeking to brave the new ministers, they would naturally give way to his legitimate rank at the king's right-hand, where he would soon be able to possess himself of the reins of government: then would be the moment, he observed, for the truly loyal catholic and protestant bodies to come forward and support him.

The fallacy of Anthony's hopes, and the great error he had committed at first, were made manifest immediately on his

reaching the summer residence of the court.

Tutored by his fair queen's uncle, and incensed against the King of Navarre by their artful management, Francis accumulated slights and humiliations upon the head of his irritable kinsman, contumeliously thwarting all his attempts to be admitted to his presence, and suffering the impertinencies of others to pass unchastised. The purpose of this conduct was evidently that of disgracing the king of Navarre, and so forcing him back to his own states: and such might have been the effect upon one naturally impatient of dishonour, yet who from long indulgence in a life of voluptuous ease, was deprived of the energy necessary to combat insult with dignity, had not Condé and Adhemar de Bourbon been at his side; and their mixed exhortations and reproofs kept him unwillingly at his post.

The policy of the Guises, then sug-

gested the wisdom of removing such dangerous advisers from their destined victim; and the royal order for the Prince de Condé to repair immediately to Brussels, there to renew, in the name of the new sovereign of France, the peace concluded by the late war, completed their triumph.

Condé had no alternative between actual revolt against the monarch's authority, and the acceptance of this distinguishing employment; he was, therefore, obliged to accept: it justly indignant at the refined malice of enemies, who thus found pleasure in making the chains, with which they loaded him, appear badges of honour.

No sooner was he set forth on his embassy, than the puppet king admitted Anthony to an audience, when refusing to hear his remonstrances, he coldly avowed the appointment of the Cardinal of Lorraine, and the Duke de Guise, to the care of the state; declaring that,

with their help, he was determined to extirpate heresy from his dominions; and that so long as his royal kinsman should obey the laws so administered, and profess the same faith with himself, he would be received at court and council with the respect due to his rank.

Against this avowal of meditated persecution, the feeble Anthony made some ineffectual attempts; representing the danger to the government of irritating so numerous a body as that of the Hugonots, who might be pushed into rebellion by despair alone.

"If it prove so," hastily interrupted the Duke de Guise, "we shall know where to seek the hornets in their nest; and they who suffer them to increase and multiply in their land, must not complain if it be trampled over — nay, trodden down, in consequence. Our pious ally on the other side of the Pyrenees, will not need much inviting to share in the good work."

Well did Anthony comprehend the threat contained in this sarcastic speech. Philip of Spain was, indeed, likely enough to seize the first fair pretext for possessing himself of the other portion of Navarre remaining to his rifled neighbour; and alarmed for the safety of his small dominion, Anthony was easily induced in an after interview with the queen mother, to accept the office of conducting Philip's bride into Spain. The hope held out to him, was, that such flattering complaisance in the first Prince of the Blood, might not merely secure him from the danger of an invasion, but eventually obtain the restitution of the towns and territory he most wished to recover.

Whatever gloss his own weaknesses put upon such a condescension, the public judged it severely; and decided, that the man who would so meanly propitiate the robber of his rightful possessions, would never more rouze into fair and

noble action: in short, he was one more example to prove, that personal bravery may exist to the highest degree in a heart totally devoid of that moral courage, which can alone produce stability of character.

The commencement of Anthony's journey homeward, was the signal for the defection and dispersion of all that yet adhered to him with lingering hope. The chiefs, as well as the inferior members of the two parties, inclined to support his pretensions with their lives and fortunes, abruptly left him and the court — withdrawing from the open insults of the one, and the insincere graciousness of the other.

When the Prince de Condé returned from Brussels, he found his brother's name fallen into a contempt which pierced his generous and affectionate heart. Emboldened by their success in thus debasing the once admired Vendôme, the Guises proceeded to fill up the measure of their injuries against his truly

magnanimous brother. By affording him only the scantiest means for fulfilling his expensive mission to Brussels, under pretext of the royal treasury's inadequacy, well aware of his magnificence of spirit, they had forced the prince to draw so largely upon his own revenues, as rendered the government of a province, long the prescriptive right of his family, an object of prudent as much as honourable ambition. This government the Guises bestowed upon another: after which, boasting their resolution to economise the funds of the nation, they dismissed every individual from their situations under the crown, who were either suspected of favouring the new doctrines, or of attachment to the princes. New places were then created, and new creatures put into them; the vacant governments of provinces were bestowed upon their own minions; and those possessed by the friends of toleration, were taken away upon that

idea. The royal mandate was then procured to forbid any one carrying fire arms without especial permission: after which, the most rigorous edicts against the protestants were carried into fierce execution. Every day the inhabitants of Paris witnessed burnings and massacres; the arbitrary seizure of heretics' properties; the destruction of their houses; and the desolation of their families. Victims were often torn from the horrid stake itself, by the fanatical populace, who believing its torments insufficient, invented others, to satiate their hatred, and prolong the misery of the sufferer. Meanwhile the innocent children of these martyrs were seen wandering through the streets, repulsed from door to door, vainly crying for bread and shelter. Those persons whom the hand of persecution had not reached, flew in terror from its approach; leaving sometimes all that was dear to them to become sacrifices for them, while they

sought safety in foreign countries, at the expense of their peace of mind, and the very means of existence.

Unable to endure such grievous sights, and frantic with indignation at his brother's weak conduct, which had dissolved their confederacy of that strength, talent, and lawfulness, by which all this evil might have been prevented, Condé ran to shut himself up in his chateau of La Ferté, near Meaux, there to exhale the madness of his first wrath, in private. No sooner had he disappeared from the scene, than a new outrage was offered by the audacious rulers of France to its most meritorious subjects. The Cardinal of Lorraine, to whom the financial part of the government was allotted, unable to make the royal funds answer his demands upon them for the numerous tools of his ministry, and at the same time satisfy the lawful claimants upon the crown, published an edict forbidding every public creditor or peti-

tioner, from urging their suit while the court remained at the summer residence, ordering them not to appear there, under penalty of death. Certainly, no executions followed this atrocious mandate, but gibbets were actually erected in the streets of Fontainbleau; and those brave officers whom the peace had left without provision, and whose bodies, covered with scars, proclaimed their right to ask reward or employment, stung to madness by such insulting ingratitude, openly threatened the tyrant minister with destruction; some hastening to proclaim their wrongs aloud to the people; others prepared to stir the coldest blood into vengeance, by dark and desperate confidences.

Some of the boldest of these men ran to throw themselves at the feet of the Prince de Condé and the Chevalier de Bourbon, intreating them to lead them against the enemies of their country; the enslavers of their king. The out-

raged nobles, whom the Guises had driven from their great employments, greedily seizing this moment of strong emotion, once more left their chateaux to demand that countenance from Condé which his brother had feared to afford them, and which could alone legitimate their resistance. The general oppression now practised by the ministers, in addition to their murderous system of persecution, rendered that conduct, they said, patriotic and loyal, which would formerly have been rebellious. In proclaiming himself the champion of the protestants, they observed, Condé would neither be usurping the rights of his elder, since Anthony disclaimed the place, nor arrogating to himself the chief seat in the king's council; he would be merely interposing between usurped power and its guiltless victims. Peaceable, though most determined interposition, Condé was prompt to promise. Loyal as patriotic, he was equally

jealous of his sovereign's rights, as of those of the people; and while he was ready to expose himself to every danger, every loss, for the latter's service, he was resolute not to fail in duty towards his liege and cousin. Guarding his consent, therefore, by these just limits, he avowed himself an abhorrer of the present arbitrary measures, evidently originating in a set of men to whom he owed no obedience; and pledging himself to the brave and the religious, by whom he was surrounded, that he would obtain freedom of conscience for them, either by intreaty or by force, whenever force was become lawful, he once more left his retirement, to make a last appeal to the king in their behalf.

CHAP. VIII.

Such were the public events, which, one by one, during the space of two months, reached secluded Roche Blanc, and kept the spirits of Aigline in feverish agitation. She knew how vividly Clarence Willoughby would feel every incident affecting the fate and honour of his friend, and how likely he was to plunge into a fiery gulf for his sake, if need were.

To see Clarence distinguished, had been the first strong wish Aigline remembered herself capable of forming. Their early studies had created and kept this wish

alive in her breast, as well as in his; and though the image of danger, — ever distinction's shadow — caused her an emotion of dread hitherto unknown, she still returned to the fascinating thought; trying to avert her eyes from its dismaying attendant, and cherishing the belief that Clarence was born for happiness and greatness united. What his part might be, in the national storm which even cooler heads and calmer hearts than her's predicted, she guessed not; but she confidently believed it would be such as became his character; and that if Adhemar de Bourbon were to be gratified by the ardor and stability of his friend, Mr. Willoughby would be ennobled by his son's devotedness to great and general interests.

Aigline was, indeed, deeply read in the visionary pages of those early romances, where the lofty virtues are the most ably represented; where none but extraor-

dinary destinies are considered enviable; and where success as invariably follows meritorious exertion, as unclouded reputation does a life of honourable purpose. Asking for Clarence Willoughby honour and happiness only on such terms, she believed that he would achieve them united. The sole danger she apprehended for him was that inseparable from the lot of a soldier — early death. Could she have lifted the veil her ignorance cast between her and the world, she might have sickened at many other dangers more grievous than death itself: such as misrepresentation of honest intention — alienation of friends — degradation of what he most idolized — the withering of many a hope believed immortal! But, happily, Aigline knew life imperfectly; and surrounded by persons whose passions were all enlisted on the side which Clarence would of course espouse were public commotion inevi-

table, she learnt from them to look only on the bright side of fortune for him and for his cause.

Not that Aigline permitted herself to dwell upon Clarence's image: she was tremblingly aware of its danger; and when the occupations of each day were over, instead of giving her sleepless hours of night to the delicious poison of thrilling remembrances, she devoted herself to that close and profitable reading, which access to the whole of the L'étoile library, now afforded her the means of enjoying.

Simple Aigline! how little didst thou dream that emulation of Clarence's late acquirements, was the root of this serious study!—that the desire to know all he knew and wished her instructed in,—the secret consciousness of becoming every day more worthy the very happiness she believed herself determined to avoid,—were the animating principles of this conduct! She failed to notice how often,

during these solitary readings, she paused upon her book, recalling not only all that Clarence had said to her upon the same subject, but how he had said it, and in what words!

Thus, scarcely looked at by herself, and wholly unsuspected by others, the deepest — truest affection, that ever possessed a human breast, grew in her heart, like some solitary sea-flower in the depths of ocean: like that was it destined to live and die, — its beauty unseen, its sweets untasted?

The changes consequent on a new reign, dismissed from an employment about the court, a Marquis de St. Maur, who, possessing a chateau near Roche Blanc, in right of his wife, came there to bury the mortification of discarded service, under the semblance of voluntary secession. He was a widower, with a son and two daughters. His income was still sufficient for the support of a distinguishing appearance in the Pyrenees,

but not so ample as to render the fortunate establishment of his children a matter of indifference. Deceived, as much by the vain boasts of the Baron de Roche Blanc, as by the brilliant appointment of the little La Marot, and the exaggerated report of Lolótte's fortune, he sought the acquaintance of his neighbour with flattering avidity. The same event which had cast him out from the court, having suspended all legal business, the Baron Roche Blanc's visit at Tholouse was stationary for an indefinite period, and he had flown back to Bearn for the amusement of wasting his money upon the decoration of his chateau; settling himself, meanwhile, in the house of Mr. Willoughby, with as much unconcern and freedom as if it were his own.

The splendid progress of the youthful Queen of Spain, through the dominions of her kinsman of Navarre, was naturally followed by crowds of those privileged idlers ever greedy of novelties, so that

the baron had the delight of surrounding his table every day with a succession of strangers, and bringing, as often, one or other of the St. Maur family to witness his popularity and agreeableness.

From the commencement of these practices, Madame la Baronne gave way to the most sinister forebodings. Lolótte's beauty, long noised over the country, together with the heightened account of her fortune, had already brought many a dissipated profligate, and scheming adventurer, into their vicinity; and the attempts to see her, nay, sometimes to get speech of her, had not of late been unfrequent. Now that such persons were actually solicited to her place of abode, the consequences might be most mischievous; and Madame de Roche Blanc, mistaking poor Lolótte's eagerness to see every new comer, for an inclination to admire and be admired, when it was in reality but the vague expectation of finding the Chevalier de Bourbon in

each, strenuously urged her husband to desist from his pernicious passion for company.

As usual, the baron treated her representations with fool-hardy disregard; but the manner and conversation of the younger St. Maur at length alarmed him, and opened his eyes to the danger his wife apprehended.

This young man, as able a politician as his father, had, from the first, made up his mind to secure the fortune of Lolótte, by way of indemnity for the loss of brighter prospects in France. So beautiful a creature could not be an object of indifference to the cold-blooded profligate, who keenly felt the power of personal beauty, without requiring one ray of intellect to heighten its attraction, and who knew himself capable of bearing a childish wife to the bondage of commanded solitude, whenever he should grow weary of her charms, or become

inclined for livelier gratifications. He first tried his ground with her parents, by declaring his indignation at the scandal raised against their daughter's mental capacity, by her rival relation; repeating little phrases or actions of hers, which he observed, as indicative of clear faculties, though shrouded, he must confess, by the most excessive yet most captivating diffidence. When he perceived that her parents were by no means obliged to him for this discovery, but preferred to retain Lolótte and her property under their everlasting tutelage, he changed his scheme of war, endeavouring to ensnare his destined victim's affections by admiring gazes, whispered admirations, and perpetual noticing of her infantine tastes. Wherever she and her sister walked, Aigline soon found Victor St. Maur walked there also: he was always at hand whenever any thing was wanted or wished for by Lolótte; yet the moment a service

was rendered, he bowed, and passed on, sighing profoundly, it is true, and gazing passionately upon Lolótte: yet was it all done so guardedly, that Aigline could neither avoid those spirit-like hauntings, nor expostulate with him on their frequency. His object was to interest her compassion, and secure her assistance; and though he succeeded in the first, he disappointed himself of the second, by privately tampering with Lolótte's incorruptible attendant. Aigline's natural delicacy and dignity of mind revolted from such a degrading measure, when it was made known to her; but that very character prevented her from discovering its motive. She fancied St. Maur must be in love to madness, so to sin against honour and propriety: and when she deemed it her duty to repeat it to the baron, she said all that a kind and inexperienced heart might be supposed to urge in extenuation of another's offence. La Marot, all at once struck with the

precipice he stood upon, came to the most extraordinary resolution for a Protestant parent:—he determined to send Lolótte for a while to a nunnery. There, and there only, he knew she would be completely secured from the machinations of either passionate or interested admirers: she would be removed out of the way of her family, whose pleasures, he observed, the care of her hampered most disagreeably; and there her unlucky beauty would be buried from every eye, along with her imbecility.

At first, Madame de Roche Blanc was shocked by such a proposal; she foresaw at once all that could be said by the zealous divine of their valley, who would reprobate a plan which threw a helpless soul into the hands of what he called heathenish idolaters. In her secret mind, this obtuse mother deemed it a matter of no consideration what religion Lolótte nominally professed; and, perhaps, in point of fact, as far as it respected Lo-

lótte herself, she was right. But it was no venial fault in a parent, avowing her abhorrence of image-worship, (thus conscience whispered), not to retain her feeble-minded daughter even in imperfect communion with the church she deemed truly Christian! Do we not dedicate our equally-incompetent infants to God and Christ, upon a similar principle, in the ceremony of baptism? Madame de Roche Blanc started at her own question; but ever selfish, and unstable in right, whenever the temptation to secure her own ease, or the accomplishment of a favourite object, presented itself, she yielded eventually to the bribe of being released from the irksome charge of Lolótte. Until the suit were ended, it would be impossible to say whether this unhappy young creature might or might not be the means of securing wealth to her family; and as such, perhaps, it was a duty Madame de Roche Blanc owed to her other children, to

preserve this from being stolen away. After dryly recapitulating the conscientious arguments against her husband's scheme, she concluded by saying, as she usually did, when her concealed wishes squared with his, "that, after all, he was master; but that if he chose to act so boldly, he must take the whole odium upon his own shoulders."

The baron was a very Atlas under similar weights; and, smiling happy indifference, went off to arrange for Lolótte's immediate removal.

When Aigline heard of this plan, which she did not do until every preparatory step was taken, grief, horror, and indignation seized her. It was in vain that the baron assured her Thomasine would be a sufficient guardian of her sister's present comfort, and spiritual security; in vain he added that Aigline should visit her occasionally; and that in a very little time Lolótte would be far more happy among the nuns, who would have

nothing else to do but amuse her, and teach her entertaining works, than she had ever been, while watched and restrained at L'étoile and Roche Blanc.

Independent of a natural and pious horror at the choice of her residence, Aigline's heart bled at the idea of sending Lolótte away from all she knew and loved, precisely at a period when her sad state, aggravated by melancholy adherence to the image of Adhemar de Bourbon, peculiarly required tender management. She eagerly offered to shut herself up with Lolótte in the chateau; and, if that could not be granted, besought her parents to let her accompany her sister to the convent. "With God's blessing," she said, "and in so right a cause, I hope I might safely defy every effort of the nuns to change my faith. Our good pastor would not fear for me under such circumstances. I could then shield my dear sister, and administer at the same time to her unequal spirits. At

any rate, the mere sight of me would make her as happy as she is now capable of being made."

The baron laughed at Aigline's superstitious tenaciousness, as he termed this natural dread of a young and virtuous heart; while Madame de Roche Blanc reminded her of her growing ill health. "Your first duty is to your mother, Aigline," she said, with more severity in her look than in her half-repentant breast; "you must leave Lolótte to Thomasine, perhaps I shall not trouble you long."

These words and her own tears silenced Aigline. She could not deny the plea urged by her mother. For some time Madame de Roche Blanc had been subject to fainting fits, which surprized her in the midst of company, and from which there was frequently great difficulty in recovering her. Lassitude and irritability strangely united, remained long after these fits were past; warning those about

her, to prepare for what she inwardly predicted, her sudden dissolution. Some inward malady, for which the medical skill of that period was incapable of finding a remedy, was in reality the cause of these swoonings; and that was aggravated by feverish anxiety about Cecile, whose early complaints had finally settled in a pulmonary one, the consequence of her unlucky plunge into the river. To stay with a mother and sister thus circumstanced was certainly Aigline's duty; and, falteringly avowing it, she withdrew from her mother's presence to run and throw herself on her knees, in a distant chamber, there to pour out her oppressed heart, in sorrow and supplication, to that one Parent, who never afflicts but for a wise and gracious purpose.

The convent selected for Lolótte's residence was at a short distance from Nerac: it was chosen principally on account of its distance, and from its being

so near the favourite abode of the king and queen of Navarre. There, Baron de Roche Blanc reckoned upon being in frequent attendance, for the sake of inspecting his son's progress in court acquirements, and court favour. To call and see Lolótte by the way was a thing of course: and, as he was not likely to go far out of his way for such an ungratifying object, Aigline was led to hope that his visits would afford the poor exile some pleasure; and that, consequently, this choice of a residence was the best that could have been made for her. With a swelling heart she got into the carriage at the time appointed, which was to convey the unsuspecting Lolótte to a species of prison. At first, Aigline had shrunk from being of the party, shuddering at the thought of so becoming a sort of accomplice in an act of selfish cruelty: but, as the cruelest part of the business was beyond her power to prevent, affection gave her heroism to conquer this

honourable repugnance; and, banishing all anticipation of her own bitter feelings at the moment of parting, by the conviction of saving Lolótte so many hours of previous alarm and agitation, she took her place by her side, with smiling tenderness, covering a bleeding heart. On first entering the vehicle, Lolótte's countenance expressed something of apprehension: that quickly ceased; and as vague a dejection then spread over her beautiful features, deepening as it fell, like the shades of evening gathering and increasing over some lovely landscape. From this apathy of appearance, she was first roused by the name of the Chevalier de Bourbon, uttered by her father, as he thoughtlessly rattled over politics and Parisians, to the respectable Thomasine and the silent Aigline; one of the baron's properties being a most felicitous disregard of his hearer's capacity or inclination in his choice of conversation. At the magic name of De Bourbon, fol-

lowed by several repetitions of the king, the court, Nerac, Lolótte's dormant faculties at once awoke, and when she understood that she was going to Nerac, she flung herself in an ecstasy upon Aigline's bosom, repeating the name of the chevalier more than once in a low and tremulous whisper. From that moment she became bright, eager, and impatient, alternately smothering Iris with caresses like a happy child; or gazing about, as if she were sure of knowing Nerac by instinct. Thomasine and Aigline exchanged tearful glances at this sad proof of their poor charge's unaltered feelings: while the baron, without stopping to consider why Lolótte should be thus transported with the hope of going to Nerac, felicitated them all, in an under tone, upon so lucky a fancy; as there could be no reason in the world, why she should not be left to imagine the convent of St. Genevieve, the palace of the d'Albrêt's.

Aigline had not spirits to waste upon the vain task of arguing against deception of any sort: she required all her mental strength, when, stopping in the gloom of twilight at the gates of a huge mass of building constructed of dull marble, obscured by ivies, and surrounded by yews and cypresses of extraordinary growth, a withered portress admitted them into a large, empty court; whence she led them to the house itself.

The dark and mournful character of the evergreens shading the cloisters which they passed along, (the only species of tree visible in these lugubrious gardens,) the hollow echoes of the cloisters, sounding like sepulchral voices, — made Aigline's heart sink. If these things were to be taken as specimens of the inhabitants of the place, what would become of Lolótte, to whom cheerful, at least, soothing images, were absolutely necessary? But Lolotte herself minded them not; hastening onwards, with the

step and glow of an Aurora, evidently in the fond expectation of meeting one cherished object at every turning.

The abbess, previously prepared for their arrival, was ready to receive the whole party in her parlour; and her good-natured, though un-idead countenance, somewhat comforted Aigline. After such conversation, as may be imagined, respecting the unconscious Lolótte's situation and treatment, Aigline gladly accepted their offered permission of accompanying a lay-sister to inspect the apartment set apart for Lolótte and Thomasine. This she found comfortable beyond the outward promise of the house; and its narrow window, looking upon a quadrangle where the nuns' cultivated medicinal herbs and flowers, gave it a more lively appearance than any other portion of the building. After a quick, yet searching survey of this chamber, Aigline looked anxiously upon the groupe of nuns now collected around

them. Most of them were examining the faultless beauty of their new companion; and, in proportion as their faces expressed livelier or duller interest, she estimated their kindly, or their apathized feelings.

One dark, faded countenance, whose humid eyes were as much shaded by their long lashes as by the veil which hung half over them, seemed to promise more than ordinary sensibility. Lolótte had met those eyes; and, whether they did actually resemble those of the Chevalier de Bourbon, or whether it were merely the resemblance of expression, she knew not; but she thrilled and started, and looked down in such modest confusion as she was wont to do, when meeting the glance of Adhemar. Another sister at that moment proposed showing their visitors the refectory and the chapel; and Lolótte still fluttered, yet delightedly so, taking the arm of Thomasine, and gazing back at intervals to see that the

dark-eyed nun was still in their party, timidly followed those that led her forward.

Aigline regarded every place she was led into with an anxiety which defeated her purpose: the striking difference of all around, with beautiful L'étoile, afflicted her to a degree that rendered her observations confused. The chapel, garnished for a saint's day, and brilliantly illuminated, which at another time would have pleased her as a novelty, made her shudder. The pictures, the images (those abominations in the sight of the early converts), the voices of some novices practising to the lofty swell of the organ a chant of singular beauty and sweetness, struck her with natural, though perhaps irrational dread. She feared the effect of those spiritual seductions upon poor Lolótte's senses: yet, as they were the only animating things observable there, could she wish them withdrawn?

Josephine, the nun whose looks most

interested her, courteously explained, meanwhile, the different objects as they presented themselves. Lolótte evidently regarded her likeness to Adhemar de Bourbon with increasing pleasure; and as Aigline noticed this, she could not help feeling thankful that even this dangerous gratification was accorded her poor sister. Lolótte, indeed, was now rising into childish spirits: that vague expectation of a happiness, which is almost as delightful as the happiness itself, began to diffuse itself through her whole being; evidencing its existence, by soft and successive glows of complexion.

From the chapel they went into the room appropriated for the ingenious manufactures of the nuns and their scholars: there, amongst thickets of artificial flowers, and piles of fanciful straw-works, Lolótte stood smiling, in the midst of the grave and sober-suited nuns; pleasure, almost brightening into intelligence, radiating from her whole person, giving

her the appearance of a young angel descended amongst creatures of earth. While she was thus engaged, sister Josephine, softly pressing the arm of Aigline, silently withdrew her from the apartment.

In one of the passages through which they hurried, she stopt, and apologizing for this conduct, said she had instructions from the abbess, to seize the first favourable moment for getting Aigline away, unseen by Lolótte, as the Baron de Roche Blanc wished to avoid agitating either his daughters or himself by a formal leave-taking; and, purposing to sleep that night at a friend's chateau on the road homewards, said he had no time to lose.

Although Aigline had been previously prepared for this silent withdrawal of themselves, and felt that it might really be the mode least prejudicial to her poor sister, now that the moment was come for putting it into execution, she found

her heart utterly fail. Bursting into tears, she sunk upon the shoulder of the compassionate Josephine, declaring her incapacity to leave this dear and unfortunate sister in so awful a residence.

The gentle accents of the nun in reply, her assurances of pity, and particular care of Lolótte, and the patience with which she heard Aigline's almost unconscious exclamations about the dangerous charms of their service, and the iniquity of image-worship, by degrees brought the latter to herself; and mixing apologies with thanks again and again, she besought her to renew those benevolent promises, and add to them the assurance that she would make Lolótte sensible that her sister's desertion was not voluntary.

As the nun renewed these promises in a tone of tempered emotion, Aigline could not refrain from seizing and kissing her hand. "May the God of Heaven and earth reward you for such kindness!"

she said, earnestly. "What a wretch should I leave this place, but for your generous pity!"

The nun smiled, shook a tear from her cheek, and sighing as she embraced Aigline, said, in an under voice, "I had a sister once, as dear—alas, more unfortunate! Her early death, with other griefs, brought me to this blessed haven. I grieve that thy erring creed denies the holiness of such. A time may come, perhaps, when thou wouldst fain find some shelter from the storm of life—remember, then, that I told thee, there is no such shelter save the blessed cross."

"I have been taught the same:" Aigline answered, modestly and firmly; "but we Protestants are bid to erect that sacred emblem in our hearts, and there crucify our sinful desires; while we go about amongst our fellow-creatures, to exercise the other Christian duty—that of active well-doing."

"It is well-taught, and meritoriously

repeated," observed the nun, attentively regarding her; "but the lesson borders on presumption, I fear. Alas! I have witnessed the temerity of braving temptations. Jesu save thee, poor child! those eyes of sensibility tell thy destiny. Thou must suffer much, because thou wilt feel much. O, beware, that guilt is never added to grief!"

Aigline started at the last fearful phrase. No thought, no wish of her innocent heart could vibrate to the word *guilt;* yet was there something so prophetic in the nun's manner, that her blood chilled, and she looked up at her in silence. Josephine's veil having fallen, left her whole face revealed: and Aigline then observed that she was past youth; that her countenance bore the stamp of many suffered woes and conquered passions; as the wasted and many-coloured woods of autumn, tell that hot suns and cold blasts, have passed over them.

"My words have terrified thee, poor

child!" resumed Josephine, tenderly. "I meant but to warn thee of the danger lurking in thine own evident character. Dread thy best affections: discipline and command them; or even they, having once attained mastery over thee, may conduct to the evil thou wouldest not. The tempter tries man by various passions; our weak sex, by Love alone. Learn, then, never to love even the noblest created thing, to such excess as gives thee in bondage to him; for if he fall, thou, so bound, wilt sink with him." As she concluded, without waiting reply she led the way along the narrow passages; where, as she glided first, her fading features, and grey drapery, (seen partially by the glimmering light she held, as different currents of air wafted her veil aside,) made Aigline think of those shadowy beings whom superstition embodies in the path to graves, and dignifies with the office of conducting spirits to woe or bliss. The emphatic warning

of the nun rung in her ears, alarming her with wild and indistinct fear: and as the days of her childish companionship with Clarence Willoughby, all at once flashed upon her memory, she felt but too conscious that her besetting sin would ever be too easy a compliance with the impetuous wishes of those she loved; that so, she might indeed be led to act against better conviction: consequently, against such influence she must guard with scrupulous watchfulness. "It is well then, perhaps," she sighed to herself, "that I am to be separated from yon dear unconscious one; my pity for her strange attachment, might reach to pernicious excess."

At this instant she heard, or fancied she heard, the remote voice of Lolótte speaking in its most animated tone: the sound thrilled through her, and she stopt in agony, exclaiming, "Barbarous that I am, even to think of quitting her!" She would then have ran back to find and

remain with her sister, had not her companion interfered; and, believing the Baron de Roche Blanc Aigline's natural father, besought her to proceed, and at least dutifully endeavour to obtain his permission to act as her heart seemed bent upon, not rebelliously defy his authority.

But Aigline's sense of propriety and duty was all disordered by her stronger feeling for Lolótte. She felt as though she had betrayed her from her home, like the repentant ruffian in the story, who beguiled the pretty babes he was hired to murder, into the dismal wood, and there left them to perish. Her compassion, she thought wildly, was no truer than his: her remorse as little valuable. In the disorder of her soul, she uttered she knew not what; losing the time she afterwards lamented, since she might have employed it in more methodically bespeaking for her sister, the care and kindness of Josephine.

Aigline's encreasing distress, and the more urgent expostulations of her companion, echoing through the vaulted passages, reached the door of the convent parlour, and the abbess came forth to learn the reason for such unusual sounds. After a moment's subdued questioning of sister Josephine, the abbess dismissed her, and led the half-distracted Aigline into the presence of her father. To the former's passionate entreaty for permission to remain at least a while with Lolótte, the Baron de Roche Blanc listened with perfect good-humour and real unconcern; telling her, in the cheerfullest tone, that if she could make up her mind to absence from her sick mother, he could have no hesitation in obliging her, though his little suppers would lose their charm and their ornament. "I must, however, remind you, my *Belle*," he added, with a slight movement of his eye, intended to acquaint the abbess with his admirable talent at

using stratagem, as well as truth, upon due occasions, "that I quarrel with the time we are already spending, lest any thing unpleasant should occur during our absence. That patch of hectic in the middle of your mother's cheek just as we set off, was vastly ominous of one of her frightful faintings."

Aigline's cheek lost all its damask at this suggestion; and putting her hand into his, she said, breathlessly, "Let us go then, Sir — I wish to go." She spoke almost convulsively; and La Marot, seizing the lucky instant, hurried out an adieu to the abbess, whose limited faculties he had previously left at gaze from the dazzlement of his showy polemics; and, retaining Aigline's hand, speeded her towards the outer court.

She was no sooner on her way to the carriage, than her grief burst out afresh, so that she was unable to hear or to answer the Baron's half-jesting consolations.

When he placed her and himself in the vehicle, and it drove away, she buried her face in her hands, as if to shut out all sight of the place where she was leaving her sister: but ere the carriage had proceeded far, she suddenly put aside the leathern curtain which formed its moveable window, and looked back. The moon, sullenly rising, distinctly marked the outline of the building itself, and of its mournful gardens: all the rest of the extensive prospect was dark and undefined. The unusual redness of the moon-gleams glaring through the trees; the funereal appearance of the latter, which were mostly evergreens of the dullest leaf, unmixed with any of the glittering sort; the mere stillness of every thing around, gave Aigline a sensation of horror. Those shroud-like cypresses seemed emitting the chill air of death, and that sepulchral edifice appeared built to entomb its victims. Its very aspect, to her disturbed imagination, was prophetic

of loss and desolation. Was she, then, leaving the unfortunate Lolótte in her tomb?

"O, my dear sister!" she exclaimed to herself, as the pang of that thought yielded to soberer, sadder feelings; "blessed would it be for thee, were it indeed so. Thy lot in this world, can never, never be happy: but in the world of Heaven, the bonds of thy guiltless spirit will be loosed, and thou mayest then adore and enjoy, through all eternity, the One all-perfect, all-good! I will not grieve for thee, then, if early death —" The scalding tears, which, interrupting this apostrophe, now flowed afresh down Aigline's cheeks, proved, alas! how little she knew the force or weakness of her own nature. Lolótte was endeared to her beyond the measure even of the fondest sister's love: from the circumstances of her peculiar situation; from the painful disagreement of her exquisite person, and her scarcely-defined facul-

ties; from the cruel restraints which her expected fortune rendered necessary; and from her aimless, unconscious, alas! desperate attachment, to the Chevalier de Bourbon. Lolótte's fortune, like her beauty, seemed given only to increase her afflictions; and there were moments when Aigline had questioned the justice of this, with tremulous consciousness of doubting the decrees of Providence. But a little reflection showed her, that to Lolótte herself, these afflictions were unknown; that, consequently, they were trials only to her family. The justice and wisdom of such dispensations then ceased to be questioned by her; and while she lamented their necessity, she submitted with entire conviction of some gracious purpose, or merited chastisement, which she presumed not to fathom.

CHAP. IX.

The Baron's journey homewards was interrupted only by the night's halting at the house of his friend. Aigline was ill able to go through the wearisome duties of society amongst persons little known, and from whom propriety obliged her to conceal her peculiarly distressed state of mind. This task was the more difficult, when she witnessed the inconsiderate vivacity of her step-father, and when she found herself detained late in the morning of the succeeding day by his insatiable passion for new faces. How grateful would she have been for those hours given to Lolótte!

Upon reaching L'étoile at last, they found the Baroness more indisposed than

when they quitted her. Whether Aigline's unintentional picture of her feelings while describing Lolótte's new residence, and what the kind nun had promised, awakened Madame de Roche Blanc's sullen sensibility towards both these daughters, or whether the period she had been left alone had given her greater leisure for ruminating upon the probability of losing the contested property in Languedoc, and so returning again to dependance solely on the Baron's fast-wasting fortune, it may be difficult to say. The effect, however, of one of these causes, was visible very soon in sudden illness, and an immediate fainting fit.

Total insensibility continued so long, that not only Aigline but the Baron was alarmed; and when the sufferer did recover, her nerves were so shaken, and her strength so exhausted, that she was removed to the quiet of her own chamber. There Aigline ministered to her, with

equal solicitude and gentleness, until she had the comfort of seeing her composed upon her bed, and perfectly conscious again: she then offered to read by her; but Madame de Roche Blanc, secretly anxious to be freed from that daughter's presence whose attentions were so many reproaches to her, expressed a wish to sleep, and desired to be left alone. Too sincerely alarmed at her mother's seizure to leave her without some attendant, and believing that this order arose from necessary consideration for her, Aigline smiled, as if assenting; and closing the bed-curtains, withdrew towards the door, where she seated herself for the purpose of watching her mother's slumber. Imagining herself alone, Madame de Roche Blanc yielded to a degree of emotion hitherto unusual in her. At first she sighed profoundly, muttering indistinct expressions of regret, and apprehension, and prayer. By degrees the sighs changed into sobs, and she wept convulsively.

Aigline now hurried towards her, and, throwing herself on her knees by the bedside, entreated her to say, if she apprehended herself in danger, if there were any thing weighing upon her heart which a daughter could soothe or remove.

Madame de Roche Blanc's first movement was an habitually angry one: bewildered as to what she might have uttered, she was too much vexed by the fear that idea had occasioned, to feel at the instant, all the value of her child's tender intention. But Aigline's continued solicitude to console or relieve the suffering she observed, calmed this sudden irritation; and, sinking into dejection from peevishness, Madame de Roche Blanc answered for a while only in monosyllables. At length rousing from it, and turning her face towards her daughter, she said fixedly,

"Aigline, I will not ask you if you love your mother; — I have not perhaps appeared to deserve it — at least you may

think so, forgetting that a mother is unavoidably obliged to give her greatest attention to her youngest and most delicate children; — but do you feel that it is your duty to soften my dying moments, whenever they arrive?"

Aigline's submissive and suffocated answer was breathed in the kiss she ventured to print on her mother's hand. The latter resumed.

"Promise me then, that, when I am gone, no inducement shall separate you from Cecile, while she continues under age or unmarried: that you will conscientiously believe yourself bound to cherish and think for her, as if you were her mother. As you expect a mother's dying blessing, fulfil this promise; — that is, if you will make it!"

"If I will make it!" repeated Aigline, in a voice of generous reproach.

"You consent, then?" asked Madame de Roche Blanc joyfully; then more solemnly added, "remember, Aigline, this

promise binds you to deny your own inclination for places, and persons perhaps, if the gratification of such inclination might interfere with your double duty to this dear little sufferer: it binds you, for some years at least, therefore, to preserve yourself from any tie or companionship, which may give another person authority over your actions, and tie you to the fortunes of some visionary expectant—some disappointed wanderer."

Aigline turned death-pale at this explicit allusion; for the idea of Clarence Willoughby, coupled with the only thought she had wished never again to unite with his image, shot through her mind. Her mother saw her emotion, but, prudently forbearing to notice it, took up the theme again.

"Perhaps I ought to say at once, by whom such authority might be exerted. Well, then, independent of the Baron, no one can have a right to control your

conduct, even young as you are, except a husband, or some near relation. On my side you have no relations except the most distant ones; and on your father's none that ought to influence you. Recollect, Aigline, if any of them ever come forward to claim you, which they can only do to torment the Baron and insult my ashes, you may lawfully resist their power, so long as you profess a different faith, and remain under the protection of a government that favours our religion. None of them will seek you, depend upon it, but from the bigotted purpose of forcing you to their image-worship. I charge you, therefore, by your duty to God and to me, never to accept their insidious offers of support and protection. In my first months of widowhood, they rejected my appeal to them for myself and my fatherless babe; they stigmatized me with the names of heretic and peasant: it was they that forced me, there-

fore, into my second hasty marriage, with a man of rank, whose very choice of me disproved their insolent assertions. The Baron's improvident habits have made me repent my hastiness; but it was done to give you a home and a protector. Promise me, then, that you will resent the affront put upon your mother by your father's proud family."

"I will never hold communion with any of them, if you wish me not to do so, — if you think it wrong," replied Aigline, faltering and uncertain; "but how can I resent? — Dearest mother, I can refrain from seizing even the greatest blessing in life, if offered to me; but I cannot promise to do any thing actually hostile to any one."

"I ask nothing of you," returned her mother sharply, "except complete avoidance of those people, if ever they seek to ensnare you;" and to induce her daughter to make this promise, Madame de Roche Blanc proceeded to give the

details of her own abandonment, by Monsieur de Venzéle's family. Kindling with recollected mortification, and unconsciously trying to justify her own resentment to herself, by exaggerating the pride and bigotry with which her only advance had been repulsed, she certainly succeeded in making Aigline consider her father's kindred as unworthy the yearnings the latter had often felt towards them. The promise sought was then freely given. Madame de Roche Blanc pressed her daughter's hand: "I will not urge you, after this, to promise the other point I have at heart; the denial of any girlish fancy, which might place you too soon under a husband's authority: I will only hope that you may have the good sense and dutifulness to obey my dying wish on that subject; indeed I feel sure that you will consider yourself bound to do so, from my leaving you free to act otherwise."

Madame de Roche Blanc was not the

first person who has made an ungenerous use of a generous principle: rightly did she judge the heart she thus professed to leave unfettered. Aigline, ignorant of all that she had not taught herself, or been taught by one as young and romantic as she, saw her own duties through an exaggerated medium; and eager to fulfil them to their utmost extent, forgot to ascertain the limits of those of others. She was, perhaps, too much alive, also, to the dazzling merits of self-sacrifice; a sacrifice, magnanimous or vain-glorious as occasion renders it. While her mother spoke, she trembled in every fibre: for the vision of England and Clarence Willoughby, of his honoured father, and a home where they might be found united, passed before her eyes, and passed away. She stifled a wringing sigh, and averting her face, said faintly, "I promise, dear mother, never to enter into any engagement which can separate me from Cecile; I will be as a mother to her, so

long as she will let me, if the misfortune of your —" Natural emotion interrupted the sentence.

"Aigline, I will recompense you for this!" repeated Madame de Roche Blanc, with unusual energy, after sudden and long musing.—"You shall find, after all, that I have not been the unmindful mother, my over-ruled will may have made me appear; but if I ensure a provision for you, I shall rely on your sharing it with Cecile, if ever she comes to need it.—God knows, what the Baron's want of thought may bring upon his family!"

The unwonted tears which gathered in Madame de Roche Blanc's eyes as she concluded, finished the conquest of her daughter: in a transport of grief and tenderness, Aigline fastened her lips upon the hand her mother extended; yet, conscious of a weight at her heart, and upon her mind, which she believed it criminal to feel. To grieve at the prospect of

her sole surviving parent's dissolution, seemed, in the sight of Aigline's delicate conscience, the only grief permitted her in a moment like the present; and as the forbidden images of Mr. Willoughby and his son, and the more dangerous memory of that son's whispered passion, returned again and again to her thoughts, she turned from their seducing presence with virtuous dismay.

Madame de Roche Blanc suffered her daughter to remain some time thus, bathing her hand with scalding and silent tears; — she was herself plunged in anxious thought. "Could I live my life over again," she exclaimed suddenly, continuing a contrite reflection aloud, "what should I do? not marry a second time, assuredly. Well, then, I am right — I am justified in wishing her not to marry. You know not, Aigline, what it is, to be obliged to battle with the caprices, the folly, the self-willedness of one whom you *must* obey, even when it is to

the ruin of all about you. Preserve your liberty, if you would be happy. I will take care, if God spares my life a little longer, that you shall have the worldly means assured to you. Remember, then, what I tell you now, that I ceased to be my own mistress after I married your step-father; well-meaning as he is, he has not always done what I approved. Remember what I tell you, whenever designing persons try to blacken my character to you after I am dead."

Aigline sobbed out a sincere protestation of indifference to worldly advantages; but incapable of guessing to what her mother alluded by the latter part of her speech, she could only express her belief of its impossibility.

Madame de Roche Blanc then sent her in search of the Baron, whom she wished to converse with alone. Aigline obeyed.

The conference between La Marot and his wife was long and private; and the consequence was, a visit from a profes-

sional man in the neighbourhood, who drew up a legal instrument, by which the Baron made over to Aigline de Venzéles, at his death, a small property, with a house upon it, which he could detach from the Roche Blanc estate, and which would secure to her subsistence in a life of privacy.

This bequest, communicated to Aigline, set the seal to her sacrifice of dearer wishes and brighter hopes: ever believing herself without claims upon her stepfather, she magnified his generosity, and her mother's true anxiety for her future provision, to a degree consistent with her profusely-grateful nature; and when all her scruples respecting her brother's and sister's rights, were insufficient to procure the cancelling of the deed, she could only satisfy her excited feelings by imparting them to the minister of Roche Blanc, and repledging herself to him, for the performance of what she had promised her mother.

The good pastor, as ignorant as herself of the transaction which had robbed Aigline of her own fortune, animated her gratitude towards her step-father and her mother. Aigline had not the courage to say even to him, that she would rather have been left to beg her bread, if left free also to share the weal or woe of Clarence Willoughby, than thus be saved from want, and plighted to the denial of her purest and warmest affections. She was bound to receive as a benefit, she imagined, what was meant as a benefit; and she, therefore, endeavoured to do so; while Madame de Roche Blanc medicined certain uneasy reflections to sleep, by considering this provision for Aigline a full equivalent for what had been taken from her: although Madame de Roche Blanc knew that the obligation to share it with Cecile, if need were, was coupled with this donation. Quite reconciled to herself, and fortified against the dread of exposure which some late circumstances

had excited, she revived again: but though she entered anew upon the every-day occupations of life, it was obviously with effort, and the gradual increase of hectic symptoms in her favourite child, keeping her spirits in a state of constant apprehension and querulousness, no rational person could imagine her shattered health would endure the struggle long.

Domestic uneasiness, however, made no alteration in the habits of her husband. The removal of Lolótte enabled him to see the whole province at will; and L'étoile soon became the rendezvous of travellers, philosophers, whether real or pretended, idlers of every description, and hangers-on. To Aigline's feelings there was a sort of profanation in this motley groupe roving through the sylvan and peaceful shades, consecrated to her as having been the residence of Mr. Willoughby. The revelry of one set of guests was like the riotous joy of Comus and his crew; while the pert

philosophising of others, even to her but ripening judgment, seemed such empty or profane babble, when compared with the simple maxims and living illustration of Mr. Willoughby's life, that she sighed over the truth of her mother's assertion. It did, indeed, appear impossible to yield obedience to such a character as her step-father's without repugnance. She strove, however, to remember his general good-nature, and her own peculiar obligations to him, whenever such ideas rose to absolute contempt, or whenever sad thoughts of Lolótte came to reproach him with selfishness and insensibility.

The change of Lolótte's residence occasioned evident vexation to both the elder and younger St. Maur: but the latter at last reconciled himself to her absence, from the certainty of its removing her out of every other pretender's way, as well as out of his; and by resolving to take decisive steps for obtaining her, whenever the law-suit should actually

render her mistress of the fortune he coveted. Preserving, therefore, in his conversation with Aigline, that tone of subdued passion, which he had penetration enough to see rendered him interesting, he sought to ensure her intercession for his supposed attachment, if ever he should find it wise and practicable to secure Lolótte in his own way.

Aigline did, indeed, consider him with compassion, and felt some pleasure in his society; for he had a plausible air of sentiment and refinement, which encouraged her to utter her own pure feelings and opinions, without those apprehensions which restrained her amongst the more frivolous or more pompous of her step-father's motley visitors. He was also a shelter to her from the compliments of admirers, and the serious importunities of one or two persons that had really taken a passion for her: but, in doing this, her heart unconsciously betrayed itself to the cool and penetrat-

ing St. Maur, who read there what she scarcely suffered herself to read in it. Victor St. Maur was unluckily one of those persons who cannot bear to see another exalted above themselves; and though he felt in reality no tender sentiments for Aigline, he soon made it his employment to lower her opinion of the idol he saw she worshipped, by mixing something pernicious in every draught of praise which he affected to bestow upon the mind and manners of Clarence Willoughby. St. Maur's sisters unwittingly aided the effect of this contemptible envy.

Both these young women, though exceedingly different, sought Aigline's society with avidity, and she naturally took pleasure in theirs. The views, their Paris histories opened of life and human character, were at first enchanting from their very strangeness and variety: by degrees they became agitatingly interesting. Their distincter

portraits of the persons amongst whom Clarence Willoughby lived, and whom he had merely sketched, certainly from motives of delicacy, promised to acquaint Aigline thoroughly with his habits, and enable her to blend her thoughts still with his modes and feelings.

Pauline, the eldest sister, was a rigid Calvinist; Aurélie, a lively, thoughtless girl, fascinated with every thing that belonged to the court, whether in the shape of dress, manners, or morals; both knew Clarence tolerably well, and both described him agreeable to their own views.

Vitiated by long residence in a tainted atmosphère, Aurélie's moral taste, so far from revolting at dissolute habits in the man whose youth, fine person, and charming manners, seemed to her a full excuse for every irregularity, really considered the suspicion of intrigues, and perpetual conquests without serious aim, part of a *fine man's* reputation. Pauline,

on the contrary, reprobated even a moderate enjoyment of innocent hilarity: and while she repeated with regret, as though they were gone for ever, many touching proofs of Clarence's natural nobleness, and purity of nature, which had come to her knowledge through the ridicule of her own male connections, she bewailed his eager pursuit of amusement amongst persons whose society, she said, must have corrupting effects; and blamed that temerity with which he snatched pleasure from the very brink of a precipice. She detailed history after history of young men who had appeared at court with equal lustre of original character, but who had lost it totally in consequence of unguarded association with the fascinating and worthless in high stations. Meanwhile, Aurélie repeated all those surmises as certainties, which the unsuspecting good nature of Clarence, and the conduct of those that had deep views upon him, appeared to authorize.

In their separate pictures, Aigline recognized too many traits of her early friend's disposition, not to tremble lest some of the later tints were as faithfully painted. Aurélie so positively spoke of the known passion for him of a lady, as much suspected as admired, and Pauline so ably represented the arts and depravity of many of his own sex, to whom the destruction of his principles would be a joy and a triumph, that Aigline began to remember the vivacity of Clarence's attachments, the rapidity of his impressions, his rash confidence, and his imprudent frankness, with something of dismay. She saw at once what instruments those qualities might prove in skilful and designing hands; and as she imagined him insensibly enslaved by the beauty and artifices of some worthless or abandoned woman, she felt such a pang at her breast as too truly convinced her the continuance of his preference was as necessary to

her future peace, as his continuance in well-doing.

Still, however, she refused to admit this last idea to its full extent; and persuading herself that she would now joyfully yield him to one that would prize his virtues as highly as his love, she persevered in refusing her thoughts permission to dwell upon the cherished recollection of his peculiar tenderness.

But to this agitating idea her thoughts recurred again and again, in spite of every effort; and the self-indulging principle, too surely planted in us all, was not long of finding excuses. She thought that she owed to the past kindness of Mr. Willoughby some solicitude about his son: it seemed selfish, ungrateful in her, to discard all anxiety upon his account, merely because it might involve her own peace hereafter. What mattered it, she thought, what pining wishes, what torments were at the bottom

of her heart, so that they rose not to the surface to alarm others, or make her act against the promise she had given her mother! Then starting from pursuing such an enquiry, she tried to believe that the trembling tenderness, with which the St. Maur family had taught her to think of Clarence, could not be so dangerous, since it represented him as capable of error, whom she had hitherto believed invariable and perfect. This apprehension, however, only rendered his image more powerful, because more agitating; and by lulling her into false security, gave the insidious sentiment which threatened her, the most complete advantage.

It was impossible, in fact, for Aigline to escape conversations about Clarence. Pauline's anxiety for his soul, rendered her indefatigable in describing its dangerous state to the familiar friend who might assist in saving it; and Aurélie's admiration of his person, made her as fond of conjuring up so charming an image in

its appropriate scenes of dissipitated amusement. Meanwhile, their brother more ably and alarmingly demonstrated how every virtue borders upon a vice, and how likely, therefore, the love of popularity, coupled with an easy and a gay humour, might degenerate into vanity, and the closest bonds with unworthy companions. Aigline could not avoid these conversations, since she could not avow the dangerous interest she took in them; and, alas! she could not seek shelter from them, in confidence towards a mother who had ever terrified her daughter's most blameless sensibilities back to the breast they would otherwise have sprung from. She was left, therefore, to manage her own heart as she could: timidly, and erroneously, of course; since, from her earliest childhood, the same maternal neglect had left those sensibilities to grow or wither, spread into fair luxuriance, or shoot out wildly and fruitlessly, without once enquiring whether

they existed there or not. No other guide fitted for that office, by similarity of sex, with the benefits of experience in addition, had yet been given to Aigline: how then could she escape the errors, the regrets, the self-inflicted wounds, consequent on such a character as hers?

To fear for Clarence's life was a pain Aigline had always been ashamed of, because he and romance had taught her so: but to fear for his moral safety was a just feeling, which no determination could silence, no sophistry divest of sharpness. Yet whenever she coupled Clarence's too vivid description of his own inconsideration and excitability, with his testimony to the awful virtues of Adhemar de Bourbon, she could not but believe that, in him, Clarence had a support strong as adamant.

"Was it likely," she asked herself, "that one so happily aided by the lofty principle of his dearest intimate, and so early trained to the love of gentler vir-

tues, by the example of a tender parent, could stoop from his own high aspirings, to such petty ambition as that of excelling the vain and the dissolute in distinctions below the desires of a noble nature? Such danger only, Aigline feared for the friend, whose character she had seen in all the nakedness of childhood: a career of vicious gratifications she could not imagine him capable of contemplating without disgust; but it was just possible that, seduced by popular opinion, and by the visible effects of his own charming powers, he might not be able to withstand the temptation of being first in societies where it would be wiser and better not to be at all; nor have the prudence to avoid the suspicion of sharing irregularities, which he would, in fact, condemn and depart from: and if hovering thus on the verge of danger, who was to say that he might not, in some fatal hour, sink into the abyss?

His very best feelings might precipitate him there unawares.

How did she mourn his separation from his father, and tremble at that false enchanted world, whose gilded pinnacles only, she had seen, when it was afar off! She prayed then for Mr. Willoughby's return: nay, almost wished that Clarence were summoned to him, though little likely in that case to revisit Roche Blanc. The St. Maurs had opened her eyes to other evils besides those already described: they had taught her to know the vast difference society placed, between a portionless girl like herself, and a descendent of the Plantagenets; and shown her the folly of imagining that Clarence would always remain insensible to the advantages offered him by his illustrious lineage. But it was not about Clarence Willoughby alone that Aigline's spirits saddened daily: many were her other subjects of painful reflection. The banished Lolótte haunted her wak-

ing thoughts and nightly dreams; often drawing her unconscious tears in sleep, and leaving on her waking, an oppression she was unable to shake off. She missed from her vacant pillow that face, "like the face of an angel," which, coupled with the purity and unconsciousness of a babe, gave its possessor the claims of infancy over Aigline's youthful heart. She missed her, too, from her well-remembered place in their chamber; where kneeling together, the sisters together asked the morning and the nightly blessing upon their blameless lives. With Lolótte, the act of prayer was certainly a dim and mysterious act, yet some glimmering of true light was evidently in her heart; and whenever Aigline thought it possible for her innocent hands to be held up unknowingly, even in such worship, to a thing of wood or stone, her anguish was too great for concealment: her mother's plausible and worldly reasons silenced, without satisfying her.

The accounts, however, from St. Geneviève, were as little distressing as might have been expected. After a period of alternate violence and deep despondency, poor Lolótte had recovered composure: she began to take pleasure in the music of the chapel, and the ingenious works of the nuns, but especially in the sight of sister Josephine, whose amiable performance of the promise given to Aigline had secured Lolótte's affection. So bound as Aigline now was to the double duty of watching her mother's health, and presiding occasionally in her place at the table of her step-father, she found no moment in which she could, without self-blame, ask to be taken into Gascony. She would scarcely allow the suspicion to herself, but she did suspect that the Baron did not bring her faithful reports. Thomasine could not write; so that as all the information she sent respecting her charge, came in the form of messages, they were at the Baron's mercy —

and he might from mistake, or from false kindness — misrepresent. Fain, fain would Aigline have gone even on foot into Gascony to see this dear sister, and ascertain the truth; but her mother's state, and the great distance, forced her to submit and endure. She could only fix her eyes upon the decision of that unlucky legacy which had brought nothing but extravagant expenditure and deepest distress into their family; and every day she made its speedy termination the subject of her prayers.

One of Aigline's minor discomforts arose from the protracted residence of her family in the house of Mr. Willoughby. There was such indelicacy in thus using the residence and servants of another; that although the ordinary wants of their household, and their additional servants, were drawn from Roche Blanc, she never considered the subject without humiliation. In vain, however, might she have repeated to her step-

father the awkwardness of their being still at L'étoile should Clarence come back, or Mr. Willoughby return from England: nothing but the vanishing of summer roused the Baron. As autumn advanced, with its train of winds and rains, the mountain-paths became less agreeable for his numerous visitors to ascend: then, and not till then, he owned that the air of the heights was becoming too keen for the tender lungs of Cecile; then was the chateau roofed as by magic; and Aigline heard with joy, purely arising from delicacy, that she was returning to the home where she had spent many a checquered year, and yielded to many a day-dream, from which she was now awakening.

Aigline's brief satisfaction ended, when she went to take leave of all her old haunts in the domain of her friends.

The favourite resorts of Lolótte first claimed her ready tears; and then those of the absent Mr. Willoughby, whom her

suddenly-depressed spirits made her think she should never see again. She meant to have avoided those spots peculiarly sacred to the remembrance of Clarence, in their time of thoughtless childhood; but, unluckily, in doing so, she came almost unawares upon the very scene of their last great enjoyment together, during the day which brought the Chevalier de Bourbon to L'ètoile.

It was one of those thickly-wooded places which Clarence had himself cleared of its heaviest umbrage and impassable undergrowths, and so let in a most enchanting prospect of the beautiful country below. The ground here was yet strewed with the faded leaves and branches of the trees which his axe had partially dismantled; the sharp trace of his wood-knife was yet upon their boles; the grass still retained the impression of his frequent steps: there lay the limb of a huge larch, where Aigline remembered he had sat down to eat some wild strawberries

Lolòtte had gathered. That sylvan seat was now vacant: neither his glowing countenance, nor Lolótte's celestially-tinted one, were to be seen; and where their voices had musically chimed together, no sound was to be heard. The whole place was deserted, silent, and forlorn. A heavy mist hung upon every object, obscuring the sky, and casting one unbroken mournfulness of hue over the landscape. Aigline's heart was sad; oppressed by the mere difference of sensations in the same scene. The happiest hours of her life had passed in and near this spot, and the present hour seemed one of her dreariest!

In spite of herself, all the delights of that last day with Clarence came into her thoughts. His evident fondness, her own enchantment of consciousness without investigation of its cause, the delicious weather, the balmy smells and sylvan sounds which seemed peculiarly to have marked that day, the vague hopes, the

lulling of every care; that trust in the future, in short, which one completely happy hour too often occasions in credulous youth, were all revived by memory; while close upon their dear remembrance came the withering recollection of her mother's exhortations, of her own promises, and the saddening views which other circumstances had opened to her.

The worldly lessons taught by the St. Maurs harassed her soul; alternately representing the possibility of Clarence's transformation into the character she might pity, but dare no longer love; or the more probable change of his affections, and his aims in life. Whatever were to be the result of his hopes in England, and his habits in the capital of France, whatever his degree of constancy, it was madness, nay, pledged as she was to her mother, — wickedness in her, to encourage the slightest expectation of ever being more to him than the friend of early days, whom equality of age,

similarity of tastes, and the grateful recollection of many a childish obligation, privileged in remaining so: and as she seated herself upon the fallen larch-bough, where he had once sat, under the tree which had then shaded him, she tried to discipline herself to bear the thought of relinquishing the happiness offered by his preference.

She looked back, with astonishment and regret, to the years during which Clarence's image had awakened only the most pleasureable feelings, and during which she had speculated upon his future destiny and connexions, with the gladsome curiosity of a sister. Her affection for him then, caused her only joy: why was it changed? Why did trouble, doubt, dejection, mix now with every thought of him, and yet such thoughts be courted by her, as though they contained the whole sum of human bliss? What fatality dragged her again and again to the

recollection of those peculiar tendernesses from him, which had certainly dropped the kindling spark upon the dormant feeling in her breast? Why did every other emotion she had felt, every grief, every hope, every fear springing from other affections, seem calm and commandable in comparison with this new sentiment? Never, till now, had she known or reflected upon this strongest passion of the female soul; and it was not unnatural, therefore, that her ruminations should suggest to her some soothing delusions. At first she thought that the character of her regard for Clarence was not, indeed, so much changed as she apprehended; since could she be assured of always retaining his society and his heart's companionship, as she had enjoyed them hitherto, she knew herself capable of being completely happy in the life of singleness to which she was now doomed. Surely, then, it was merely

the fear of losing both these, by his removal to another home and his probable adoption of dearer ties, which thus afflicted her! Something at her heart whispered that she was mistaken; and that but a melancholy sort of happiness would remain for her in life, if she were to witness the transfer of his fondest preference to another, even though blest with his continued society and his undeviating friendship. Such happiness, however, was dearer in her estimation than peace of mind with oblivion of him: nay, she rashly decided, that if entirely separated from him for the remainder of her life, she could find more enjoyment in his reputation and prosperity than in the recovery of her heart's freedom.

Had any judicious friend been near to have entered into her feelings and shared her counsel, they would have taught her the misery of fostering a passion in her heart which she was forbidden

to gratify: they would have taught her to take some heed for herself; and not leave her future peace so at the mercy of one, whose influence over her solitary life would be unknown to him, and whose change from good to evil, from fortune to distress, must afflict her the more from her total want of power to counteract either his untoward fate, or his wayward feelings. Such a friend would have exhorted her to this care as to a serious duty; since the heart so devoted, dedicates itself only to an idea, barren of those active virtues which follow the reciprocal and authorized affections. But Aigline had no such friend; and accustomed to absorb herself in those she loved, was not yet aware that there is a certain protection of our ownselves which is not selfishness. Perhaps, even thus informed, she had not acted in conformity with the conviction: heads better instructed than hers, and hearts longer

disciplined, might have yielded, like hers to the temptation of living on the sweet poison that was to destroy no life except their own. Such is human frailty! over which, they who are superior to it, may weep without diminution of their high merit. For a selfish and kindless nature no apologist dare appear: while in behalf of those who err from the excess of generous affections, there standeth ever a mediating angel between them and their worst offences.

Aigline's bewildered reason on the present occasion, well deserved this extenuating mercy: since she forgot her duty to herself, solely from anxiety about the future worth and well-doing of another. Though she might not be the partner of Clarence Willoughby's life, she might surely remain his friend; exhort, persuade, influence him, if possible, to what they both reverenced. As she thought of the temptations and suspicions which

the St. Maurs described as surrounding him in France, she remembered, with dismay, his early habit of courting personal dangers solely for the delight of combating and overcoming them. That habit he had evidently carried into society, and enjoyed the exercise of, amongst greater perils than any which threaten the body. He had owned to her himself, that he had not unfrequently resisted even his friend de Bourbon's counsel, when excited by a sort of romantic knight-errantry to enter some dangerous circles in the vain hope of drawing thence an individual whom he believed willing to be saved or worthy the attempt, he had dared the suspicion consequent on such imprudence. He blamed himself, also, for being so often drawn from the side of study and the Chevalier into crowded assemblies, either from curiosity to finish some amusing adventure, or from the desire of punish-

ing some insolence to his friend by mortifying the vanity of the offender. All these self-censures convinced Aigline that he was still as incredulous of what he wished not to believe, as quick to resent the injuries of those he loved, as impetuously forgetful of consequences, as in his boyish days: yet while she yielded to this conviction, and lamented that his noblest powers were lying thus unused amongst these lighter scenes of life, the candour which had put her in possession of such information, nay, the very cause of his faults, (some virtue or some charm in excess,) made her only hug his image more closely to her heart.

Absorbed thus in one idea, she continued for a long time sitting under the branching trees, regardless of the wind and rain now beginning to strive amongst their foliage: till, as she sat, her thoughts assuming a softer shade, instinctively

clothed themselves in the language best suited to the sentiment which filled her heart, — addressing themselves thus

TO CLARENCE.

Here, where the scattered boughs, the opened glades,
And paths leaf-strewn, and trodden wild flowers show
Where last with thee I roved,
Watching thy form beloved,
As like a sylvan god's thy vig'rous arm
Broke the deep-matted trees ungraceful row,
And quick on darksome shades
Powered light's creative charm!

Here, where each echo rung
With the clear music of thy tongue,
As on my happy name so oft it hung; —
Here, where my trembling eye
Like April's fitful sky,
Or thrilled to the repeated glance of thine,
As side by side in transient pause we stood;
Or from short distance seen
Through many a bowery skreen,
Beheld that brow divine,
Beaming like day-star 'mid the sombre wood!

Here, where each breeze that moaning passes by
Seems freighted with a sigh,

Whispering sweet fancies fond — Ah! fond as vain! —
I sit me down to muse,
And while the cold blast strews
O'er my sad head mixed showers of leaves and rain,
I think of thee, and weep;
And all thy looks and words, in long array,
With memory's spell recal.
Ah me! what mortal rash, may ever say
"My heart's repose shall never break its sleep:
"Ye charms of form and soul, the trance defies ye all!"

Though by my childhood loved, until the time
When from youth's dawn to its accomplished prime
That aspect dear had passed, and met my sight
In its full glow of manlier graces bright, —
I guessed not half the power
Of human aspect; nor foresaw an hour
In which expression's added witcheries,
(Like shade and light,
Or rainbow dyes
Of changing colours painting evening skies,)
Should with the Mind's strong charm, my gazing soul surprize.

And till with wond'rous change,
Through every theme
Which fills the hero's, and the poet's dream,
I saw thy spirit range,
I knew not half the joy
Which woman's may employ,

While so excursive, through the world of thought
On eager wing by loftier pinion taught,
  She follows where that leads;
And upwards borne, by strength of high desire,
  Fluttering proceeds:
Till, by her nobler guide's attraction brought,
She scales the steep of noon, the orb of fire,
And at Heaven's golden gate lists th' angelic quire!

And, oh, till Love I knew, whate'er of deep
  And powerful interest held my peace in thrall,
Was but such fleeting airiness as sleep,
When I compare it with that force intense,
Which every thought and sense
Now binds to thee alone!—
  Art thou not all
Romance would prize, and reason half disown?
Destined to worthiest goal, yet loitering still
With reins unheeded on the brink of ill:—
  Now, reckless, listening to the syren strain
    Which would thy rapid car,
    Though Honour beckon'd far,
Stop in its radiant race;—
  Now stretching onward o'er the sllippery plain,
Intent perfection's crown—youth's noblest chase—
  With toil, through shouts or scoffs, unswerving
    to attain!

Yes, thou art such! but formed to stir the heart
  With each variety of hope and fear,
And with unconscious art
  To make thy faults beloved, thy danger dear;—

Thou must for ever be
Coupled in memory
With all that earliest taught this breast to know
Each noblest feeling's glow: —
Then, since to thee I owe
Whate'er of best is mine, —
O twined with every thought of days now gone!
May'st thou but firm in thy dear self remain,
And honour's sun upon thy brow
Shine cloudless, as it shineth now,
I will not of my own chill lot repine;
Nor deem love's prayer for thee, or wrong or vain,
Though breathed in secret on this heart's poor shrine,
With many a tear and sigh, before the *Almighty One!*

CHAP. X.

The intrepid openness with which Condé avowed his support of the Protestants, and his conformity with their opinions, met with that respect from the new court, which brave and upright conduct never fails to wrest even from its enemies. Refusing on the just plea of his kindred to the throne, the mediation of ministers, he demanded an audience of the king; professedly with the intention of exposing to him the danger which threatened the state, from the violent counsels of those who now directed it, and of laying at his feet the petition of his suffering subjects, both Catholic and Protestant.

Declaring that he would not quit the court until his representations had been heard, and his suit answered, Condé demonstrated by his lofty mien and princely state whenever he appeared in public, that the humiliating experiments so successfully tried upon his brother, would prove abortive with him.

None who saw his bearing now, could forget the signal address with which he had avenged an affront put upon him by the Duke de Guise, when the latter would have contested his hereditary privilege of bearing up the royal train at the coronation of the king. Affecting to treat this meditated insolence, with disdainful incredulity, Condé had proceeded through the line of Guise's titled retainers, to his station, with his customary gaiety; apologizing as he went along, to the duke himself, for the doltish misapprehension of some of his people, who had engaged in an affray

with those of the latter, injuriously imagining he meant to usurp their master's place in the ceremonial. "A scandal as absurd," Condé added, with mischievous pleasantry, "as though they had said, your Highness meant to be crowned this day, instead of my royal cousin."

Guise remembered this bitter moment, too well, to court another such; and Condé, resolute to maintain his rank upon all public or private occasions, so to mark the difference between the blood royal and that of the foreign Princes of Lorraine, was no longer assailed by such irritating efforts at debasing and disgusting him, as had driven Anthony Bourbon back to his own court. He had to fear only for the unshielded head of his nephew, upon whom some species of insult might be rained with impunity: but whether it were, that the reigning faction guessed the risk they would incur by

such conduct, of incensing the soldiery, whose idol the Chevalier was, or whether they were calculating the policy of gaining him to their party — they refrained from crossing him, either in his pursuits or his peculiarities.

A slight indisposition confined the king, and this circumstance furnished a pretext for delaying his interview with the Prince de Condé. The patience of the latter was soon exhausted; and anxious to be released from the irksome duty of attendance, that he might return to the sick chamber of his consort, whom he had left languishing at Meaux, he sought the queen-mother, to enforce upon her the necessity of a speedy audience being granted him.

Inwardly mortified by the sudden declension of her own dignity, and every day seeing her power over her son divided between the young queen and her haughty uncles; the mother of Francis II., was not disinclined to lend an ear even

to those princes whom she had dreaded as rivals during the life-time of her late husband. Fluctuating between the two parties, because uncertain which would grant her the largest share in the domination of her son, and in the command of the royal purse, she received the Prince de Condé with that air of good-humoured easiness, and simple docility, which she had long discovered to be the surest method of throwing men off their guard. She listened to his vivid picturing of the public misery, less with the attention of an acute politician, than with that of a pitying woman, amiably concerned to heal the wounds thus exposed. She besought the prince to instruct her — and tell her what concession she must endeavour to obtain from her son, through her small remaining influence. Condé had but two suits to urge, he replied, first, the immediate suspension of all the edicts against the Hugonots, until their doctrines could be explained by themselves before a general

council, and so proved to contain nothing inimical to the government: and, secondly, the writ for assembling the states general, that the king might there hear the voice of his whole people through their own chosen organs, and be thus informed whether the monstrous abuses committed under his name against the nation, were really performed by his present ministers, or were only the murmurs of a few disappointed individuals.

"Let his majesty grant these suits," said Conde as he concluded, "and he shall receive instant proof, that the princes of the blood-royal seek no separate advantages for themselves. We will leave our rights to be settled along with those of our com-patriots, in the great assembly of the nation: we will withdraw from court and council, lest our presence should be supposed to interrupt the operation of his government; and I will engage to calm the popular feeling raised in our favour, (indignant at seeing

our just claims disregarded,) by publicly protesting against receiving any grace from our sovereign, until the general grievances have been constitutionally exposed and settled, and his majesty in a situation to act spontaneously and freely. I am warranted to say this for my brother of Navarre, as for my cousins Montpensier and Roche-sur-yon."

"And what says the Chevalier de Bourbon?" asked Catherine de Medicis, turning her seemingly sportive, but really fathoming eye upon the cheek of Adhemar. That varying cheek told the emotions he would have concealed; but mastering himself, he replied with grave dignity, "I venture to call myself a Bourbon, Madam; and I, therefore, go along with all of that name, in every personal sacrifice for the public good!"

"Your sacrifices are, perhaps, greater than theirs!" observed the subtle queen, animated by the displeasure with which

he had glanced at his ardent uncle — "If they have the value of the widow's mite, Madam, —"

Adhemar did not finish the sentence, but he had said enough for his observer, who feigning disregard of it, turned to Conde, asking, whether he would be contented for his Hugonot clients, provided she procured from the king such a relaxation of the edicts framed by the present ministers, as would leave them free performance of their religious rites in private, without apprehension of future punishment in consequence; and release those who refused attendance upon mass, from the existing penalties of such contumacy?

"Beyond this concession, perhaps, as a good Catholic," she added, smiling, "I ought not to urge my son. — This will, however, relieve the inferior classes; and you, princes and nobles, must remain subject to the test, of being present at mass, ere you can retain or accept places of

honor and profit. Consider ere you answer me."

"Not a moment!" exclaimed Conde, ever jealous of his disinterestedness; "relieve the lower ranks from the terror of burnings and proscriptions, and we, of the higher, will contentedly wait till the august body of representatives, either deprives us, or restores to us, the right of demanding situations, once the prerogative of our birth, now degraded by distribution amongst the creatures of a base faction."

"And you are content to yield up such noble, powerful situations!" asked Catherine.

"I disdain to scramble for them amongst knaves and cowards!" exclaimed Conde; "but by yon bright Heaven, what is mine own — what came into the world with me, — my royal blood, and princely rank, I will defend from attack or insult, in the teeth of my crowned

cousin himself — were he mad enough to give them hindrance! — You may tell the Guises, therefore, if you will, Madam, that such is my determination; and that if my two present suits are denied, I will maintain my place near the king's person, until they can prove that I have forfeited it by treasonable, or base actions. They may, therefore, look to themselves — for my counsel shall be unceasing to the king for their removal."

"There may be some, that would willingly aid you in that risk, if you are sincere and constant in the resolution, and would be wary in the doing," said the queen, deliberately eyeing both her companions, as she slowly uttered this.

"I understand you, Madam!" returned Conde, smiling, a little severity mixed with the pleasantry of his expression. "Your fair neck is somewhat galled by the yoke that has borne on the people's, till it drops blood! Of course,

your son is led by his lovely consort, and she is unconsciously — on my faith, I believe, unconsciously — made to counsel cruelties against the Hugonots, and indignities against the higher noblesse! I can believe, that it is your interest — therefore your inclination, to overturn the house of Lorraine; but though I desire their destruction by all lawful means — nay, perhaps, if the occasion justified me to my conscience, would not hesitate employing open force to effect it. — I scorn the foul path of secret machination. — Have the courage, Madam, to avow to them, and to your royal son, the interest you take in the present miseries of France, and we are natural allies directly: none will be more true to you as a friend and kinsman than Louis de Bourbon, upon such terms; shrouded friendships, he abhors!"

The frank and loyal nature of Condé bordered upon indiscretion: yet was it a noble indiscretion, for it never compro-

mised any man's safety except his own. His present bold avowal, and rejection of the sort of league covertly offered him by Catharine, was an additional proof of this character. His nephew's fitful cheek coloured, and grew pale repeatedly while he was speaking; "Policy is not machination, my noble uncle!" he exclaimed, abruptly.

"Granted!" returned the prince, "but the straightest path to a right object, is always to be preferred, to bye ones;—when you are baffled in that, then try others, provided they are not the ways of treachery, or cowardice. The strait path I look to, is the assembly of the notables."

"Are these almost impracticable maxims for courtiers, taught in the school of Calvin?" asked the queen-mother, masking the insidious purport of her question, under an air of charitable indulgence; "if they are, no wonder his religion makes few proselytes amongst

men eager for advancement,—nay, I will say, men honourably ambitious of attaining to stations of power and usefulness. In spite of your unknightly tilt against weak woman's weapons—(apparent submission, coupled with conscientious determination)—I will frankly confess, that the greatest services I have ever rendered to the most deserving, have been the painful fruit of cautious watching of times, and humours, and momentary disgusts: without which holy craftiness—may I call it so?—I could not have gained my suit.—Deem ye that unrighteous?"

The queen's shaded, yet sword-like eye, was still obliquely fixed upon the countenance of Adhemar, though her face fronting his uncle, seemed solely regarding him.

"I am no casuist, Madam!" returned Condé, embarrassed by his reviving recollection of what was due to the queen's sex, rather than to her rank; "if the purpose be good, I am apt to believe, the way

will always prove honorable. So, doubtless, your policy comes not under the censure of my reforming apostle."

"I marvel not at the noble Conde's easy compliance with any creed which prompts the frank and daring virtues;" observed Catherine, with a look of seductive admiration, "but methinks, at his age, and with his enthusiasm for all that delights the heart and the senses — with his reputation also, for making wider conquests in our drawing-room, even than those he has made in the field, the rigid morality of his new religion, must be a little distasteful. I marvel that he should fly our more amiable provision for human frailty."

The prince, to whom this insidious compliment was addressed, crimsoned to his temples. Whether it were meant as a compliment or a reproach, it merited the shew of indignation with which he replied; "I confess, that my temperament inclines me strongly to pleasure,

and that it has hurried me formerly into things which I never remember without shame — the better principle within me, evercondemned such actions; I have, therefore, abjured that pernicious religion which puts the purchased absolution of pope's and consistories upon a level with actual purity of life, and I cleave to that venerable faith, which refuses my debasing passions indulgence. Even so, I may be tempted from the right path; but with the blessing of God, I will at least chuse my guide well; and give myself the best chance for reaching the Christian goal at last."

"You will at least allow some merit to our Catholic system of indulgences!" observed the queen, with a happy return to pleasantry; "Confess, now, that you have just made good use of that, zealous Hugonot as you may be!" Condé bowed and smiled. "Prince," she added, with instant assumption of dignity, "it is my wish, as well as my interest, to

support the princes of the blood, against the overweening race of Lorraine; and if I had found the king of Navarre ready to encounter the risk I was willing to run, of either losing ourselves, or securing our lawful ascendancy — he in the government, and I in the confidence of my son; by this time, Anthony would have been steering the vessel of the state, — the Prince de Conde would have had the government of Picardy, — and the Vicomte de Limoges, the place he so well deserves in the royal house of Bourbon.

"For the first of these personages, I am good Frenchwoman enough, to wish now nothing attempted: for the two last, I can only lament, that they are resolved to abandon their own interests — the corner-stone, upon which public interests might be more surely built — in the chimerical expectation of seeing the national wrongs constitutionally redressed. While the Cardinal of Lorraine, and the Duke de Guise, command the councils of the

king, and their beauteous niece commands his amorous fancy, who may nurse the mad hope of seeing the states general assembled to sit in judgment upon one and all of them? — but perchance," she added, with sudden sprightliness, "some thunderbolt may fall, and kindly rid us of the brothers."

"It *must* be a *Heaven*-commissioned bolt, Madam," answered Condé, fixedly regarding her, "a blow in open day, and before all Europe — or even I, who profess to have no tears ready for their obsequies, will weep their fall.

"Women are, indeed, simpletons, to meddle with state matters!" Catherine said, with such apparent good humour as might have awakened contrition in a less kindly breast than that of Condé's. "We utter follies, and then are answered as if we meant to prompt murders. Dear prince, be a little more charitable — more just!" She paused, and her eyes glistening with tears, (O wond'rous power of

counterfeiting truth's holiest seal!) encountered as if by chance the deeply-fixed and perturbed, rather than searching gaze, of Adhemar de Bourbon. Affecting to be ashamed of her own emotion, she looked down, and said, with an interesting mixture of confusion and carelessness — "I care not who sees my heart, though it may be to my own hurt, perchance; but I will own before you both, princes, (at this last seemingly-heedless expression de Bourbon's blood pressed in tumultuous heaps upon his respiration,) that without pretending to mix at all in politics, I do confess a mother's grief at seeing herself daily more and more excluded from the confidence and affection of her eldest born, and a woman's mortification at being abridged of half — my vanities, if you please — under the plea that the shrunk revenue is insufficient for the royal maintenance of two queens. I know whence these mortifications issue, and I pretend

not to bear them unchafed. If the princes of the blood care to redress the wrongs of a widowed queen along with those of the people, they will beware how they force her to make a compact for her own security with their bitterest foes." The queen withdrew abruptly as she concluded this mixture of threat and invitation, leaving Adhemar de Bourbon rooted to the spot, rather in a sort of stupor than in a trance of thought.

Condé looked after her departing steps for a moment or two: "And if Coligny's eye have not sounded her subtle heart to its depth, I stand not here!" he exclaimed. Adhemar de Bourbon heard him not; his whole faculties were bound up in one strong interest. During this interview the queen had never addressed herself direct to him, but she had left an impression upon his mind which he could not shake off. It seemed to him, that a little judicious management on the part of his uncle would have led her into an

open avowal of some plan for dislodging the Lorraine faction, which might have been both practicable and honourable, and of quicker operation than the slow process of a national assembly. It was probable that she still felt her influence over her son great enough to effect the transfer of the ministry from the Guises to the Bourbon princes, provided she had sufficient temptation to rouse her to the task: it seemed evident that she waited only for Condé's guarantee for her retaining that portion of power which it was natural in her to desire; consequently, if Condé would have assured her of that, and made less violent profession of his Hugonot and chivalric principles, the whole change might have been operated without difficulty or bloodshed; and their own private interests have been gratified, preparatory to those of the public. How did Adhemar curse that hated bar in all his paths — the blot of his birth — which forbade him to mix

upon equal terms with his uncle in this discussion with majesty! He had burned to take the lead, and pursue the track which she opened, and the prince neglected! Now that the restraint of etiquette was removed, he hastened to express these sentiments to his uncle.

Condé heard him with frank good humour, as frankly answering, "I am no match for a Machieval of any sort, Adhemar, much less a female one; so you must excuse me for declining to enter into a league with the queen-mother. I admit the justice of what you say, that our interests are now hers; and I see as you do, that she waited only a promise of participation in power, ere she would set to work in good earnest to dislodge our enemies. But the discerning Coligny is wrong, if she will ever admit a rival in power; or if there be any artifice she would not stoop to, to effect our ruin, whenever that might become necessary to her purposes. She has, besides, a

youth of gallantry to redeem by a maturity of good works — and we know what those words mean in her church's book of merits: — she will, therefore, extinguish no fires that bigotry may light, depend upon it. And do you think I will enter into any compact with such a woman? Do you think I will admit her into the secrets of the Protestants, only that she may know better where to find, and how to strike them!"

"But if such as you, my uncle, were once settled in the places whence the Guises were driven? If Catherine's policy be to aggrandize and extend our house, as she more than insinuated—"

"Ah, my poor nephew!" exclaimed Condé, affectionately, "has she limed that twig so well?"

Adhemar de Bourbon blushed to burning: it was ever painful to him to bare this secret rankling of his soul, or have it touched; and he stammered out some inarticulate words. "I guess her plans,"

resumed Conde, "she would amuse you by the hope of the legitimating act,—my brother Anthony by the mock restitution of Upper Navarre, and me by the prospect of unlimited toleration for the Protestants. Before each of us she would hold our favourite object, drawing us on, until we had assisted in overturning the Colossus that stands in her way as well as ours; and then when that was done, and we thought ourselves within clutch of our desires, she would sound the tocsin to the Catholics, seize the sword of state—on my faith it would be a sword!—and down we should sink into the gulph she had prepared for us. I tell you this, to show you that policy alone bears me out in refusing her insidious confidence—but I *will* boast a nobler motive for disdaining such pernicious fellowship—abhorrence of plot and dissimulation: I would not save even my country, at the expense of my honour! No, Adhemar, I will seek by the laws, what the laws

can maintain: if the king refuse to hear the voice of his people uttered through the constitutional organ of the states-general; or if he refuse to assemble them, when all France groans for the relief they only are likely to afford, then it will be time to solve the fearful question of what is, and what is not treason! Then, if hard necessity obliges me to raise the standard of resistance, and seek the aid of foreign sovereigns, I will do both in the fair face of Heaven; calling on the God I would fain see "worshipped in spirit and in truth," to bless my arms, as my designs are honest, and my motives pure. Till then, nephew, we must beware how we give suspicion of our motives; learn to scorn every gift from corrupt bestowers, as I do, from my soul!"

Condé stopt, nearly breathless from the rapidity and fire with which he had spoken. Habituated from his character and high station, to the freest disclosure

of his opinions, he did not always handle the sore sensibilities of his nephew, as delicately as it might have been both humane and wise to do. He simply blamed Adhemar for continuing to think of the legitimacy at a time when he would have had him disdain it, in comparison with public objects; but he saw not that his nephew was pierced to the quick every time the extent of this desire was sounded, or demonstrated. Clarence Willoughby, with equal ingenuousness and impetuosity, saw clearer: delicacy, added to ardour in his character, enabled him to guess and to spare the weaknesses of a friend.

With affectionate thought of him, Adhemar endeavoured to turn the conversation to wider subjects, at least to remove it from this one painful point: he wanted courage to discuss it fully with any one; even with himself. The nobler half of him scorned that other part which clung to selfish gratification, while a whole na-

tion's wrongs demanded every power of the patriot's mind, every wish of the patriot's heart. Yet was there a busy devil in his brain, left by the subtle manner of the queen, which whispered to him that both private and public advantages were attainable by the same road of policy. Controuling his tumultuous agitation as much as possible, he first combatted his uncle's severe view of the queen's sincerity; then unable to debate that, hazarded his opinion of its being lawful to use the advantages that temporary co-operation might secure to the injured and oppressed, while privately prepared to defend themselves against her infidelity or caprice.

Condé would not hear of such union upon any principle; he persisted in the adventurous resolution of open demands and open satisfaction; of giving all his actions to the people's eyes; and so justifying his possible after conduct to his contemporaries, and to posterity.

In the resolution of periling fortune and life in defence of national honour and happiness, Adhemar de Bourbon entered with full soul. Death was a mote in his estimation, compared with inglorious or contemned life: and when he would have lent a listening ear to the counsels of Catherine de Medicis, he would have done it rather from the expectation of sooner bringing public and private griefs to an issue, than from any thought of avoiding loss and hazard.

"Then am I to understand, Monseigneur," he said, with cold gravity, after some moments pause between them, "that until the states-general are convoked, we are to swallow every indignity those in favour may please to offer us—stomaching them as we may?"

"Swallow indignities!" exclaimed the prince, blazing out in the full spirit of his times; "not one! Had you ten thousand swords, and as many lives for as many quarrels, you have my leave to

use them as becomes a gentleman and a knight. Thank God, the laws of honour are yet untouched! Those miscreants that trample down all others, dare not set foot on one of these — nay, not on the shadow of one! Avenge an insult on the instant. 'Tis not an unchristian counsel, I think," he added, checked in his unchristian vehemence by his nephew's lofty smile, 'do as thou wouldst be done unto,' we are told. Well, then, the man most jealous of his own honour, seldomest offendeth against that of another; so —"

"You had better not push the scrutiny too far!" interrupted the Chevalier; a smile of softer light, because mellowed by melancholy, gleaming through the deep shadings of his eyes. "My uncle!" he added, with sudden emotion, and wringing the hand he seized, "do you ever place yourself in my situation? Do you ever imagine how the contume-

lies we have been speaking of, gall one that has no right to resent some of them?"

"Assuredly I do," replied Condé, rapidly; "but shall I tell you, fairly, that if you once had courage to look your destiny in the face, and familiarize yourself with its only homely feature, instead of nursing this hopeless passion for a goddess in the clouds, you would be a far happier and nobler character. You would find that the blot of your birth is not seen in the blaze of your reputation; and you would no longer expose yourself to the petty warfare of cowards, who, knowing where you are vulnerable, launch their contemptible arrows, and laugh to see the heroic Adhemar wince at a pin's point. Go — go — foolish boy! take counsel from your friend Willoughby, whose notions of honour and dishonour are of the true stamp."

As Condè spoke, he moved away, leav-

ing his nephew to ruminate on what he had said, not follow his advice. At this moment Adhemar felt his spirit too feeble, for an encounter with that of the friend he really honoured as truly as he loved; with him he felt even more unequally yoked than with his uncle: since Clarence with a disputed rank, in a foreign country, and in earliest youth, could not stand on the same 'vantage ground as a prince and warrior of established fame, to whom contempt of contumely and ridicule was in truth easy; therefore, Clarence was more magnanimous in his disregard of both. Disappointed first by his uncle Anthony's timidity, and now by his uncle Condé's intrepid nature, Adhemar saw that none but dark and doubtful ways were likely to lead to what he coveted: yet dark and doubtful ways were precisely those from which Clarence would have turned with aversion; nor was Clarence the person to allow any selfish interests to

have weight, when those of thousands were in the same balance: he was, therefore, the last person likely to countenance the measure of courting the queen's confidence, in the hope of combining her power with that of the discontented. Troubled and self-dissatisfied, Adhemar turned from the garish precincts of the court, and wandered away towards the beautiful meadows then bordering the Seine, and known by the name of the *Pré aux Clercs*, now the site of palaces and public edifices unnumbered. Absorbed in recollection of his uncle Condé's parting admonition, and feeding on the wormwood phrase — "that goddess in the clouds!" as applied to his hope of being one day admitted to the full privileges of his blood, he was met by the most active member of the Hugonot body, Jean de Rénaudie, so memorable afterwards in the history of this turbulent period.

Rénaudie had voluntarily taken upon

him the hazardous and toilsome office of agent-general of the reformed churches; and visiting in that character every country of Europe where the doctrines of Luther and Calvin were preached, was able to calculate to a fraction the number, wealth, and weight of the Potestants all over Christendom. His intrepidity, his unwearied spirit of hope, his zeal, his fire, his admirable presence of mind in great emergencies, his sweeping oratory, and contempt of worldly possessions, (for he coveted only men's admiration,) rendered him the apostle of the commonalty, and commanded the respect of the great.

Struck by the unwonted disturbance of Adhemar de Bourbon's countenance, who would have passed him; he boldly stopt, and saluting him, remained resolutely at his side. The intolerance and presumption of the new rulers, for Rénaudie was but just returned from Germany, afforded him a fair pretext for commencing conversation uncommanded

by the noble personage to whom he had joined himself. In spite of the latter's habitual self-restraint and lofty manner of speech, as he replied, the keen-eyed Rénaudie saw deep into his discontents; and hurrying on from the narrative of one bloody persecution to another, and from question to question—all privileged by his peculiar duties—soon threw his companion's spirit into such a confusion of contrary purposes, that he was not long of divining what sting rankled most in the proud and warlike breast of the Vicomte de Limoges. Formed to conduct the huge machine of party, Rénaudie was one, who, having fixed his eyes upon a great and laudable object, was not nice in the motives of his instruments: so that whether liberty of conscience were to be purchased for his fellow Protestants by blood or bribes; whether the princes were to be enlisted on their side from pure patriotism, or private resentment, it mattered little to

him: individual virtue, or individual safety, seeming as nothing in his generalizing view, when compared with the virtue and safety of the many. Thus do the best mislead themselves, when they suffer even their holiest affections to kindle into passions!

The high military and moral reputation of the youngest Bourbon, his reserved manners promising secrecy and determination, and his presumed influence over his illustrious uncles, rendered him an object of peculiar interest to one, already meditating the scheme of that confederacy which afterwards ripened into action. Without completely fathoming the depth of his companion's feelings, he saw sufficient of his deep-seated indignation at the Guise faction, to warrant his own strongly-expressed abhorrence of their relentless policy; but ably confining himself, during this accidental rencontre, to general lamentations of the tyranny exercised over their fellow-chris-

tians, and repeated representations of what foreign potentates and the nation expected at the hand of its noblest princes, and in what they were prepared to second their magnanimous exertions, he succeeded in adding fresh fuel to the fire already kindled by Catherine de Medicis. He then went on his way, towards other objects of similar hope and enterprize.

It was long ere the chaos of the Chevalier's mind cleared into light: the images Rénaudie had darkly placed there, only by degrees assumed distinctness. These, and the hopes previously insinuated by the queen-mother, thrust out all inferior ones. By a singular chance, the secret views of two powerful parties were shown to him: the queen evidently thought all wholesome change in the administration impracticable by constitutional means: the apostle of the Protestants had just assured him, that foreign sovereigns thought so too; and that the Hugonots were not

disposed to trust the promises of a ministry, unmixed with men of their own persuasion.

Thus both the queen and the Hugonots, more than hinted at a secret confederacy for removing the Guises by stratagem or sudden force, when they were unprepared for resistance: a chief only seemed wanting.

At that thought, Adhemar de Bourbon's heart stopt its pulsation: he scarcely breathed; and hot and cold drops stood at the same instant upon his forehead. — Where was that chief to be sought? The nation demanded a warrior — the Protestants, a member of the reformed church — the nobles, a Bourbon. The princes of the second branch were both Catholics; and of the first branch, Anthony of Navarre was too vaccilating to take the post, and not betray it; Condé, too proud to stoop to needful policy. What Bourbon then remained, except he that had the legitimate name yet to win? He, that might be allowed

to think himself able to add the prudence Condé scorned, to the enterprize Anthony's character seemed to have lost!

But would not the assumption of such a post be a sort of robbery of his kinsman's rights? Ought not Condé to be allowed, at least, the option of accepting or refusing the dangerous distinction?

Yes, perhaps, when the enterprize should be ripe for execution: then if he were to refuse, what arm might so fitly draw the avenging sword, as that of Adhemar's, whose blood had flowed from boyhood in every war-field of his country, whose stainless reputation honored the religious creed he professed, and whose resentment against the family of his mother, might be privileged, since they evinced only stronger animosity to his advancement from their relationship, and meanly took advantage of his natural wish to bury the memory of his mother's frailty, with her name, in perpetual silence?

In imagining himself the chief of such a confederacy, Adhemar saw before him either a death of doubtful glory, or the blessings he thirsted for: — his own elevation, the humiliation of those that sought to humble him, and large means of favouring and protecting others. While, if he neglected the present opportunity of suggesting and organizing such a confederacy, — if he submitted to the guidance of his uncle Condé, and continued going with him in every measure, he must cease to think of aught beyond the restoration of general good, and content himself with only his share, in common with others. Thus he must relinquish his long-hoarded hope, or secure it by private negociation with the queen-mother, or by more secret and more dangerous league with the discontented. That *ignis fatuus* which had happily conducted him hitherto through fields of martial honor, was now wavering over

the shrouded paths of stratagem and treason: he feared to lose his object, by striking into a different road; yet he revolted from the possibility of divorcing himself from the counsel and companionship of his friend. By linking himself either with the queen-mother, or with the party shadowed over by Rénaudie, he knew he would be embarking in a perilous, because an undefined enterprize. He was aware that when a man pledges himself to act with others, he is entering into engagements that may lead him far beyond the limits he would otherwise never have passed. Yet with others he must act, or act not at all. De Bourbon believed himself incapable of yielding assent, in cold blood, to a plan of actual treason, — to any plan, in fact, which threatened either his sovereign's rights or person; — for he was loyal at heart; but with just apprehension of his own weaknesses, which made him a

fit subject for designing men to work on, he paused, ere he advanced a single step in the road of secret complot.

It was not his own life, or honor alone, he might forfeit by such temerity, but that of his nearest kinsmen. A Hugonot plot discovered, would throw the great body of Catholics into such consternation, that it would be easy for the faction, whose interest it was to do so, to involve the whole race of Bourbon in his destruction. And was this exposure of them a due return for so many years of confidence and kindness from both his uncles — from Condé especially?

Adhemar paused: he drew back with instant horror from what he had anticipated just before with turbulent eagerness. Yet, he thought, if his object were the same with that of his uncle, although sought by quicker and rasher means, would not patriotic intention, absolve him from the sin of setting the

lives and fortunes of his race upon a throw?

Condé had, he thought, practically taught him this principle, not four hours since, and shown, by unceremonious sacifice of his nephew's interests, that when men are previously agreed upon the attainment of a given object, they are at liberty to act for each other, independent of further consultation!

To what miserable sophistry do our passions reduce us! — Adhemar was conscious that he was not purely actuated by zeal, for the civil and religious liberties of his compatriots; that, on the contrary, he vibrated between such sacred aspirations, and the petty interests of self-love; — yet he talked to himself of patriotic devotion, and dared to parallel his alloyed motives, with the unadulterated one of his uncle! He then recurred with bitterness to the various expressions which had displeased him in their late conversation; and tasking his me-

mory for many heart-burnings between them, in past times, arising from indiscreet openness on the one side, and calamitous sensitiveness on the other, seemed inclined either to find an excuse for his meditated disregard of his gallant kinsman, or to exalt his own magnanimity in determining to perish rather than injure him.

"I have owed little to this rude-speeched uncle," he exclaimed, moodily, "since I reached the age of rivalry with him; yet will I give my head to the block, instead of his, if need come! My dying breath shall acquit him. So shall he live for — rule, perchance, hereafter — while I descend to the grave with a disputed name — a traitor, or a patriot, as men's passions make me!"

More disquieted with regard to Clarence Willoughby, de Bourbon revolved the question of concealment or openness with him again and again. It could not

have been a question had he been satisfied with the singleness of his own motive for wishing to act in opposition to his uncle: but unable to say that no selfish hope animated him; nay, afraid of his doubtful purposes being put to shame by Clarence's generous preference of transparent conduct, he decided at last that he had better conceal them until they were full ripe. That would be the moment for trying whether his friend would embark his honour and fortune with him in the same perilous adventure. Believing that he would do so out of pure love, de Bourbon determined to employ the time allowed him by circumstances in more closely observing the queen, and sounding the views of such spirits as Jean de Rénaudie's: then, when he had ascertained the purposes and power of both, if he found them favourable to his own impatient wishes, he might confidently confide the enter-

prize they suggested, to that heart which if it revolted from espousing the bold and doubtful counsels of his, was at least sure never to betray them.

In this frame of mind he returned into society.

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